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THE LODESTAR

The
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"She sat looking . . . with far-away eyes."

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THE LODESTAR

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To My Mother

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THE LODESTAR

I

About three miles west of Burnham the road to Perkins Mills turns abruptly to the right. It leads straight up a long, gradual hill and tops a ragged, rocky ridge, and then curves sharply westward again around the upper end of Darius Hyde's place. On either side of the road runs a sturdy wall made of stones neatly piled up after the usual manner of New England. On the right-hand side of the road at the lower corner there is a break in the wall, closed by a set of four rudely trimmed bars set into rough-hewn posts. This is the entrance to the pasture lot, a big, sloping field, irregularly studded with gray boulders and its thin soil covered with close-cropped grass and patches of huckleberry bushes; it reaches clear to the top of a high, steepish hill. On the left side, just where the wagon road turns, the wall is pierced by the approach to Darius Hyde's

place. As you go down through the maples that back the inverge you come quite suddenly upon a wooden bridge spanning a clear, cold brook, which sings its way cheerfully through overhanging willow trees and into the leveller fields. Then, after you have crossed the brook, you continue along a narrow, fern-lined way through a walled orchard of gnarled apple trees and up a gentle slope again, and then across a grassy yard you see the low, white, green-shuttered old house, set back against the hill in a clump of hickories and majestic elms that swing their branches over its shelving, shingled roof, which runs down in the rear to form a long woodshed, around which many lilac bushes grow. Off on a knoll near by stands the big red barn in front of the muddy barnyard with its high railed fence, and the other trim outbuildings. The cultivated portion of the farm stretches to the southward, and off behind is a single field, and then a swampy piece enclosed by a snake fence, and then the great wood lot.

One sunshiny spring day, when the tender pink apple blossoms were fading a milky white and their petals were commencing to drift through the branches, which stirred in the gentle west wind, and to checker snowily the brown earth, a horse and buggy paused before the entrance to Darius

Hyde's place. The horse was a lofty, yellow animal of Gothic conformation, with obtrusive ribs and knees, and a large, mild eye. Under pressure his customary gait was a hesitating shamble, but on the major part of this journey he had melted into a slow walk, in which each foot was deliberately and distinctly set down before the next one was lifted. This conservative rate of progress was accepted cheerfully enough by the two young men who occupied the vehicle, but their asperity was moved toward the shiftless liveryman who had neglected to grease the axles. For the off hind wheel had developed a most virulent case of hot box and the off front wheel was threatening to succumb to the same malady. At the turn of the road the driver pulled the yellow horse to a stop — no vast exertion was employed — and addressed his companion.

"We'll never get back to Burnham, Ollie, at this rate," said he. "That wheel's going harder all the time."

His apprehension did not trouble Oliver Burgess overmuch. The air was balmy and the sky was bright.

"Why don't you unhitch the horse from the buggy," he suggested hopefully, "and ride him into town? I dare say you could get another

horse and buggy there, and you could just tell the man where you had left this one, and come and take me off. I don't mind a bit waiting here for you." He stretched himself lazily.

Hamilton King regarded his animal with thoughtful and deep disapproval. The picture of himself riding this gaunt, yellow beast into Burnham, his legs dangling lankily down its bony sides, with only a frayed lap-robe for a saddle and no other equipment than the battered driving harness, was not in the least to his fancy.

"Don't mind me, old man," his companion continued pleasantly. "I'll enjoy sitting here. Shipwrecked mariner on a comfortable reef waiting for succor. Perhaps some one will come along before you get back, and give me a lift into town. Perhaps I'll go to sleep. Perhaps you've got something to read — you fellows that write almost always have a pocket edition of something or other in your clothes. Go ahead, now — it won't take you long. If you can manage to raise a canter out of this moth-eaten monster, you ought to be back inside an hour."

The moth-eaten monster stood patiently awaiting the signal to take up his weary way again. His ears, one of which was slit down the middle, drooped dejectedly, and his nigh hind leg had

sunk hopelessly under him. King looked at him with an especial critical inspection of the backbone, which ran high and sharp and threatening down the creature's long back.

"What! — me ride that?" he replied with a trace of acerbity. "Not by a good deal! If I wanted to experiment on bisecting my own spinal column longitudinally, I might gallop Alfred the Great, here, into Burnham. Otherwise not — distinctly and decidedly not! If you're so keen about riding, ride him yourself."

"Oh, I'm not keen about it," his companion hurriedly answered. "I only offered it as a suggestion. You're in command of the expedition. I can see now that you're quite right — I hadn't noticed the guard-rail effect on top of him. But you're not going to stop here all the afternoon, are you? Not that it isn't perfectly delightful here; but it's an indefinite sort of place to stop."

"Robert Louis Stevenson," remarked King, reproachfully, "once observed that to travel hopefully was a better thing than to arrive."

"Oh, yes, of course," Burgess admitted; "but when Robert Louis Stevenson made that particular observation, he had probably just gotten home from some unpleasant place and was sitting in one chair with his feet on another, smoking a cigar

Besides, that doesn't apply to our case at all, because by no extension of the term — unless you mean that we're away from home — can we be said to be travelling. In other words, what are you going to do about it?"

King wet his finger, and leaned over and touched the edge of the axle.

"It's perfectly clear to me that we can't get back to Burnham this way," he said; "and as you, with your usual lack of foresight, have neglected to bring both axle grease and cigarettes — which make delays tolerable — I am going into this farmer's to get fixed up. Go on!" He struck Alfred the Great sharply with the whip, and the yellow horse moved slowly forward.

The vehicle rattled down the stony road through the gap in the wall, where the maples were budding vernally; it went rumbling across the wooden bridge through which the little stream, black and swollen, was tumbling hastily along; it followed on between the orchards, snowy with their masses of blossoms; and it plodded along up the slope and across the yard to the low, white, green-shuttered old house. There the eyes of the young men framed a picture that stuck in their minds for many a day.

On the top step of the four steps which led up

to the wide piazza of the house sat a girl, who had watched with interest the buggy make its slow approach up the driveway. She was nineteen or twenty years old, rather tall, and very soft-eyed; she was dressed all in white, and she had put a small spray of apple blossoms in her smooth brown hair. She sat looking at the approaching vehicle with far-away eyes, and with her slender hands clasped over her knees; and when it halted, she came slowly down the steps.

"By Jove!" said Burgess, under his breath. King put the frayed whip into the shaky socket and took off his hat.

"I beg your pardon," said he, civilly, "but we seem to have developed a hot box in one of the wheels of this buggy, and we thought perhaps we might be able to fix it here."

"That this horse," said Burgess, indicating with a gesture of profound contempt the faded steed before him, "should have attained the velocity sufficient to cause a hot box appears, I admit, most improbable — almost incredible; but, unfortunately, it is true."

The girl glanced swiftly at Alfred the Great, and smiled frankly up at the two men.

"If you will drive up to the barn," she said, pointing the way, "I will try to find our hired man."

"Thank you very much," King answered. He replaced his hat on his head, and shook the reins over the back of the yellow horse, which reluctantly proceeded, the girl going across the yard in front of them. Burgess deliberated whether politeness demanded or lack of acquaintance forbade his leaping out and escorting her; he prudently decided to remain where he was.

When they arrived before the barn, the girl had disappeared into the building, and the two young men climbed out of the buggy and stood awaiting her return. Presently she came back, and there was a little trouble in her look.

"I'm very sorry," she announced, standing in the doorway, "but I've just remembered that Hiram has gone to a funeral, and my uncle is away, too. But I'm sure we must have a jack and some axle grease somewhere — I presume that is what you want."

Burgess took it upon himself to reply.

"Far be it from us to begrudge Hiram his innocent diversions or to regret from selfish motives your uncle's absence," he said. "And your presumption is quite correct — a jack and some axle grease is exactly what we want."

"Then suppose you both come in and help me find them," the girl suggested. A very faint

gleam of amusement shone on the surface of her long-lashed eyes. "Will your horse stand?" she inquired gravely.

The two young men looked back on Alfred the Great, who appeared to be sinking into a gentle stupor.

"He's capable of it," said King. "I think he's capable of almost anything. Yes, I believe he'll stand," he remarked thoughtfully, and then they all three went together into the barn.

"I'm afraid I don't know very well where the different things are kept," the girl confessed. "Now, where do you suppose they keep the jack?"

For a moment her guests were at a loss to reply. Each of them was perfectly positive that the proper place to keep a jack was, of course, in the barn, but each of them was totally unable to name a more specific location. Suddenly an inspiration came to Burgess; with as much confidence as if he had been all his life an hostler he advanced his theory.

"It ought to be somewhere near where they wash the wagons," he announced authoritatively. "Don't they always take off the wheels when they wash the wagons? Where do they wash the wagons?" he asked his young hostess eagerly.

"Outside, in the yard, I think," she replied.

This answer was certainly a setback, but just then King spied the desired article in a corner.

"Here it is!" he called out, holding it up. "Now for the axle grease!"

"Don't you think it should be near by?" the girl said.

"But it isn't," King answered, after investigating.

Here the alert Burgess perceived a possibility.

"Very likely it's in the harness closet," he suggested.

An inspection of the harness closet actually brought to light that which they were seeking, and Burgess felt that he had recovered his lost ground.

"Ah, I thought we'd find it there!" he remarked triumphantly, as though the subtle intricacies in the arrangements of a strange barn might puzzle him for a moment but not for long. "And here's a wrench, too! You'd both of you forgotten that we'd need that, although I suppose I might have unscrewed the nuts with my strong, nervous fingers," he explained.

The jack, the wrench, and the axle grease were borne out to the buggy, when Burgess was seized by another idea.

"First we'll have to cool the axle, of course," he announced.

At this display of profound mechanical knowl-

edge the others were silent. Neither King nor the girl asked why. The girl asked, "How?"

"Cold water," said the young man, promptly.

But King was not wholly destitute of ingenuity. And what he possessed he turned to very practical use.

"Cold water?" he echoed with a trace of what verged on indignation in his manner. "Cold water? Decidedly not! The axle must cool off naturally. Would you ruin the temper of the whole thing, man, to save a paltry five minutes? You have absolutely no idea of the value of other men's property. Cold water, indeed! One might think the buggy belonged to one of us."

The girl looked carefully at the vehicle under discussion. Its body was cracked and scratched, the wheels bulged in and out inconsistently, the paint had flecked off in spots, the top was dingy and weather-worn, the shafts were warped and one of them hung lower than the other, the cushions and lap robe were faded and frayed; its general appearance was one of pathetic senile decay. The gleam of amusement came again into her eyes.

"You don't own it, then?" she inquired in mock surprise.

The two young men looked seriously at her and

then at their turnout. The unchecked head of Alfred the Great had drooped; evidently he was grazing along the verge of the Elysian Fields.

"No," King replied gravely; "we don't own it. Astonishing as it may seem to be, we were able to hire for vulgar money at a common livery stable this priceless pearl of transportation."

"Really?" was all the girl could say. "Really?" King thought there was the most delightful ripple of a laugh in her voice, and he was struck by the fact that he had never before seen one pair of eyes capable of changing through so many different shades of brown. When this girl was serious her eyes were deep and dark and cool like a quiet, shaded mountain lake, but when her mood went from grave to gay her eyes caught sunshine and life and laughter like a swift, merry little brook. He ventured another glance at them.

"Yes," he went on; "for the absurdly moderate stipend of two dollars in the currency of the realm we are allowed the exclusive use of this — what shall I call it? — this transportational plant during the whole afternoon."

"Axle grease, of course, being extra," Burgess put in.

"A fact of which we were heretofore unaware," King hastened to add.

The girl's eyes caught the sunshine as Burgess stood watching her, and he took his inspiration from them.

"I think," said he, deliberately, "that what the axle needs is a complete rest for at least ten minutes."

"I should have said fifteen," King interposed.

Their hostess looked from one to the other of them.

"Perhaps, then, it would be pleasanter to wait at the house than here — for us," she said.

Her suggestion was voraciously snapped up by her visitors.

"Very much pleasanter," said King.

"By all means — thank you," said Burgess.

The girl turned toward Alfred the Great, who now seemed chained in solid slumber.

"Don't you think you had better hitch your horse there?" she said to her guests, indicating a wooden post.

"He might be a somnambulist, you know," said Burgess to King, warningly.

"It seems to me to smack of ultra-conservatism — to savor of nervous effeminacy rather than of true caution," King replied in mild protest. "However, in deference to the suggestion I will hitch him." And awakening Alfred and leading

him forward, he burrowed under the buggy seat for the tie rope, snapped the catch in the yellow horse's bit, and fastened him securely to the post. "There!" said he.

Then they began to walk down toward the house, one of the young men on each side of the girl. At this point King decided that mutual introductions would be in order.

"While I would have been glad to accept your axle grease in a purely impersonal way," he began, "I am not willing to accept the hospitality and the friendly shelter of your residence — for I dare say it *is* your residence — without letting you know who I am."

His hostess looked somewhat surprised — even alarmed.

"Oh, I say!" Burgess protested. "He's not as bad as all that," he reassured her.

"Nonsense!" said King. "I merely meant that I would like to introduce myself — if you had no objection."

"Not in the least. Who are you, anyway?" Burgess replied heartily.

"Nonsense! I didn't mean you," King retorted.

"I have no objection," the girl said, smiling.

"I am one Hamilton King," explained the young man on her right, "and my friend here —

and I dare say you *are* my friend," he remarked across her shoulder, "is one Oliver Burgess."

"And I," said the girl, "am one Eleanor Hyde."

"Good!" said Hamilton King. "Now we're all properly introduced. There's nothing like a proper introduction to put three strangers perfectly at ease with each other," he remarked. "Before this I could detect just a trace of embarrassment and constraint, a faint hauteur in all our manners. And now it is all blown away," he gestured lightly, "by a mere mutual disclosure of identity. How delightful!"

"Will you come in, or shall we stay out here?" Miss Hyde interjected. They had reached the house.

"If you don't mind," said Burgess, decidedly, "I wish that you would sit down on that top step —where you were sitting when we came up the road. You looked so comfortable there," he explained lumberingly. As a matter of fact it was by no means a bad spot he had selected; a slumbering maltese cat bore evidence of the soundness of his choice.

"Very well," the girl responded. She sat down, arranging her skirts about her. "Will you sit here, too, or will you get chairs from the piazza?"

"If you don't mind, again," said Burgess, "I should like awfully to sit at your feet. I haven't sat

at a girl's feet in so long a time that I'm fairly pining for it — I give you my word, my blood leaps through my veins at the thought. Of course I should sit at a perfectly respectful distance," he added.

"Then I suppose that you may," his hostess replied.

"I, on the contrary, shall get a chair," said King, and with gross utilitarianism he helped himself to a very large one and placed it on the gravel path at the foot of the steps. "Now we are ready to cool off that axle," he remarked, settling himself with an audible sigh of comfort.

The two others laughed.

It occurred to Burgess that it was high time to evince an interest in the affairs of his young hostess.

"You live here, Miss Hyde?" he inquired with grave, polite inanity.

Eleanor was unequal to more than a simple affirmative.

"Yes," she acknowledged.

"And a very beautiful spot you have chosen," said King, approvingly, from the depths of his chair, looking about him with frank admiration.

"I like it," Miss Hyde answered truthfully; "but I didn't choose it. I was born here."

"How romantic!" Burgess commented with questionable appositeness. "There's something

romantic about being born anywhere, it has always seemed to me. One's utter helplessness — all life before one — all that sort of thing, you understand," he explained. "Now I presume you've lived here all your life," he hazarded.

"Given the two terminals — find the line," said King. "Unworthy of you in its simplicity, Ollie."

"Yes," Eleanor answered Burgess. "I've lived here the most of my life with my uncle — except when I was at Allingwood at school."

It struck both the young city men that it was somewhat extraordinary for a Connecticut farmer's niece to have gained her education at the fashionable and exclusive Allingwood. Evidently it was from there that this girl had gained the poise and the grace of manner by which she had been enabled to meet so easily the complicated nonsense they had talked. But they were a little perplexed.

"Your uncle keeps a farm, I take it?" King inquired politely.

His question might almost have been deemed superfluous, but the girl was gently affable.

"Yes," she replied; "we keep a farm. We raise mostly milk — and vegetables, cream, and hay for our own use," she specified, catching the spirit of the occasion.

The young men laughed. And meanwhile Bur-

gess had been sifting his memory along the line of mutual acquaintance. But first King let fly a mild shaft.

"You keep cows?" he asked with an affectation of real interest.

"Yes," Miss Hyde answered. "They require considerable care, but the public seems to fancy their milk better than any other sort." The young hostess was giving as good as she received.

Burgess had come to a mark upon his quest, and he broke in:—

"You must have been at Allingwood at the time May Brinton was there," he said.

Eleanor acquiesced rather than enthused.

"Yes. She left school a few months after I entered. I didn't know her very well."

"Is she John S. Brinton's daughter?" King asked Burgess.

"Yes."

"Her father's very rich, isn't he?" Eleanor inquired. The family plutocracy shone alarmingly from the only child.

"Very rich," said Burgess.

"Very recently—very suddenly," was King's qualification.

"They've taken a place here for the summer—that is to say, in Burnham," Burgess stated.

Miss Hyde's interest did not warm to exuberance.

"Have they?" she said in a perfectly level voice. "Do you think Mr. Brinton will bring all his automobiles along? He used to come up to Allingwood quite often to see May, and they say he had a touring-car of a different color every time he came."

"I guess he'll bring quite a flotilla of them," Burgess replied. "John S. can usually be relied on to shed a faint odor of gasoline over the atmosphere wherever he passes by. And the smell of ignited lucre is also more or less noticeable in his immediate presence. But in spite of it, he's really a very good sort of man."

"I've heard he was decent enough—although he liked to hear the double eagles go pop," said King.

"Are there any other children?" Eleanor asked.

"No," Burgess responded; "May is the only one, and Mr. Brinton is a widower. There's an aunt or something, who took up the chaperonage contract years ago, and travels about with them. She doesn't count at all, but you'll doubtless meet her."

"I don't believe I shall," the girl replied. "I knew May very slightly, and I seldom go into town, anyway."

"But don't you get very tired of staying out here?" inquired King.

Eleanor laughed, but her brown eyes deepened just a little wistfully.

"Yes, I suppose I do, sometimes," she confessed. "I like it here awfully, but one gets tired of any one place, I think."

"But you have callers and visitors?" King suggested.

"Sometimes — by accident," his hostess returned, smiling.

"Which brings me reluctantly back to the thought that by this time our axle must have cooled off," said King.

So they all went back up the hill again, and the convalescent buggy was jacked up, and each wheel in turn was greased as skilfully as two very inexperienced young city men were able to do it, while Miss Hyde commented encouragingly upon their labors. When this job had been done, King unhitched the yellow horse from the post and thrust the tie rope under the seat.

"We're very much obliged to you for everything," he said.

"I shall tell May Brinton that I saw you here," said Burgess.

"Good-by," said King. He took off his hat,

and held out his hand to the girl, who allowed her slender fingers to rest for a moment in his.

"Good-by," said Burgess, following his companion's example, and climbing into the buggy after him. He spread the frayed, brown linen lap robe over their knees, King clucked to the yellow horse, and Alfred the Great moved slowly off down the hill.

II

THE angular steed took the homeward road at a shambling trot, for the cuisine of the livery was an ever forceful magnet to Alfred. As they went past the orchard Burgess gave one swift glance backward up the hill, but their young hostess had vanished from sight. He substituted his companion to his attention.

"Well?" said he, inquiringly.

It was natural that King should follow on his train of thought.

"Curious — extremely curious," he remarked to himself reflectively.

"I meant the girl," Burgess explained.

"Of course," King answered. "Ollie," he said, motioning back with his whip, "how on earth do you suppose she happened to get here?"

"Well, she *said* she was born here," replied his practical companion. "That's an explanation worth considering, I should say."

King brushed this aside.

"It doesn't explain anything at all," he retorted.

"I don't quite understand it. Why, I know of a number of clever men who have spent years looking all over the world for that very girl — and I can't much blame them for having missed her." He suddenly veered to his direct subject. "Wasn't she charming?" he said frankly.

"Very, indeed," Burgess replied. "I never saw eyes quite like hers before, Ham — quite so many colors. Say," he said, almost shyly, "I'm no sentimentalist or anything of that sort, but I've got some little eye for art, and if I could paint that girl sitting there on that step against that dingy old farm-house, with the sunlight on her hair and her eyes very deep and asking me questions I couldn't answer — well, I think I'd like to stay out there a few weeks — or years — and finish the picture."

King smiled and gently flicked the yellow horse on the slit ear.

"Sounds effective," he admitted with caution. "It's too bad you can't dabble a little with the colors, Ollie."

"Yes," Burgess returned. "And what's more, I can't even write — like you. Now there's a chance for you — why don't you put her in one of your stories?"

King was still smiling a little.

"She's in every story I ever wrote," he said with complete seriousness.

"What do you mean?" asked his companion.

"Just what I say," the first man responded.

"Oh!" said Burgess. And for a while they drove on in silence.

The buggy went jogging along the narrow road, which was stony on the wash of the hilly places, muddy in the hollows, rutted and caked along the levels. Between the way and the paralleling walls green weeds were beginning to spring from the rough texture of the dead, brown roadside growth. On the gray tree-tops there was commencing to show a tinge of tender green from the bursting buds. The drive of the two young men took them along beside great pasture lots, and where the ground swelled more softly, long lines of curving brown furrows led away, and now and again they came upon an emerald field of winter wheat, its intensity of coloring contrasting vividly with the demure tone of its surroundings. Here a whirling brook would rush hurriedly down to swell the brimming little river; there a barred gap in the wall would disclose a rutted, grassy road running along a field side to the serried woods below. And by field and wood and wayside, birds were flying and calling. At last the

buggy topped a crest and began to descend a long, straight hill that fell evenly down into a little valley; and at the foot of the hill was the railroad station, where the line which wound along the valley made its terminus; and up the side of the opposite slope and lying along the ridge was the town of Burnham.

Alfred the Great took the ascent with dignified deliberation, pulling steadily on the dubious traces, and finally turned in at a crescent driveway which led up to the door of the Burnham Inn, a long, low, shingled structure, painted dark red, and carrying a look of substantial, quiet comfort. Out from behind some indefinite where, a shabby boy came into being, standing needlessly at the horse's head, while the two occupants of the buggy dismounted. King unbuttoned his top-coat and dug into his change pocket.

"Frank," said he, "here's a quarter for you. Take back this rig to Mr. Jenkins, and tell him that the axles haven't been greased in some years. Tell him that by his neglect on this point he has caused me to go somewhat out of my way and delayed me considerably. And thank him for me."

Frank took the quarter but failed to grasp King's climax.

"What's that?" he said, staring dumbly.

Burgess laughed, and the two young men turned toward the door of the inn. The shabby boy looked doubtfully after them; then he put the coin into his pocket, swung himself into the buggy, shook the reins over the back of the yellow horse, and drove out of the inn yard, whistling, one burst-booted foot hanging rakishly out over the edge of the buggy box. King and his companion had passed into the office.

"Almost five o'clock. Have a drink, Ollie?" he asked.

Burgess reflected.

"No thank you — I think not," he said. A waitress came out of the adjoining room, which she had been sweeping. "Annie," said the young man, "I believe I will have some tea and toast. You may bring it out here into the office. And Annie, while it is always pleasant to know that one's food has been thoroughly cooked, this does not apply with equal felicity to one's drink. In this connection I do not hesitate to affirm that the tea which this establishment set before me yesterday afternoon had been boiled for several hours and then set on the back of the stove to simmer, as the cook-books say. No more like that, and you love me. And Annie, aim to distribute the butter over a wider surface-area of toast rather

than attempt to preserve its integrity in one unmolten central mass. In simpler language, spread it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Annie. "You want tea and toast, sir," she interpreted rather proudly, having caught the first sentence.

"Quite so," Burgess replied.

"I'll have some, also," said King, and the waitress went out.

Burgess selected a comfortable chair, and sat down.

"I believe I *will* speak to May Brinton about her," he said reflectively.

"About Annie?" his friend inquired, with an affectation of innocence.

"Of course not," the other man answered. "About Miss Hyde."

King lit a cigarette and threw the match at a remote cuspidor.

"You'd better be careful," was his warning. "If the Brintons should really take her up and start her off as they could start her if they chose, you can't tell what might happen to her — you can't tell where she'd finish."

"Very good," Burgess responded. "I admit all that. But I believe she'd finish with the leaders, and if she stays where she is, very likely nothing at all will ever happen to her."

It was in King's mind to suggest that perhaps this alternative was not altogether undesirable, but he hesitated to voice the suggestion for fear that it might sound cheaply cynical.

"It would certainly give her a chance," Burgess argued.

"It's not a chance — it's a risk," King corrected him.

"Don't you think she'd make a hit in that set?" Burgess asked.

"A hit? Of course she would. She'd make a hit in any set. She's perfectly charming," King replied quickly. "But look at Brinton and his crowd, man! I don't know him and you do, but I've always understood he was a sort of wild-west millionnaire without even the restraint of social ambition. He doesn't care for any one's opinion. Of course there probably isn't any harm in him; in fact I've heard of some pretty decent things he's done without advertising their authorship; he's undoubtedly a man of generous impulses, and his ingenious energy and absolute independence are rather amusing to a comparative outsider like me; but isn't he a queer bird to put back of a country girl on the social road?"

"I like Mr. Brinton," his companion responded. "I don't know him very well — he's a good deal

older than I am, of course, although he's such a hustler he seems a good deal younger than he is; and he certainly is amusing, and his unaffectedness and sincerity are simply delightful. If Mr. Brinton feeds you on terrapin that cost five dollars apiece and you find it out, he isn't a bit embarrassed over your discovery; he gives you the impression that he knows there aren't many men who can afford such things, but he's glad he's one of the few that can; it isn't that he's pleased because you've caught him giving you something fearfully costly, but because its cost doesn't make the slightest difference to him. And if you have a taste for terrapin, the sort Brinton gives you is usually worth to you what he pays for it."

"So I've always understood," King commented dryly.

"He's absolutely frank, too," the other young man continued. "He's not one of your ordinary sudden plutocrats — the sort that hire genealogists to shake down the dead branches of their family trees and drag them into the Pilgrim Father organizations. Mr. Brinton rather brags that he hasn't got a genealogist on his pay-roll, and doesn't want one. Back of his father, he says none of his ancestors ever did anything for him, and he hasn't even a friendly interest in them.

I believe his father invented something very common — clothespins, or something of that sort — although a lot of people claim that the old gentleman stole the invention from an intimate friend. At any rate, he got it."

"How interesting!" said King, laughing. "I never knew before where his money came from."

"He made most of it, though, in Wall Street," Burgess said. "And a lot of it there is, too. It came so fast that it doesn't seem possible that it was legitimate, but no one's ever tried to prove anything. Mr. Brinton doesn't care what people say, anyway. At some dinner a while ago the men around him were trying to draw him out about the unscrupulousness of the stock exchange, and Mr. Brinton laughed and said, 'Gentlemen, you'll never get me to raise my voice against an institution that lifted me from mere prosperity into the very front ranks of the nouveaux riches.' I admired his sentiment."

"Very courageous and commendable, I'm sure," said King.

At this point Annie entered, bearing on a tray the tea and toast.

The sun was fast falling to the misty horizon of the western hills, and a chill breeze was blowing down the valley, so an open fire was kindled on

the hearth, and near it the small table was set. Burgess did the honors.

"So you think you'll speak to Miss Brinton about her?" King went back to the subject.

"I think so," his friend replied, pouring in the hot water. "You see, if she stays where she is, nothing at all may ever happen to her," he repeated his previous argument.

There came to King another thought than the comparative desirability of the alternative. It struck sharply on him that no matter how effective it might be made, concealment could not wholly block the destiny of Eleanor Hyde.

"It's my opinion," he remarked with decision, "that unless I'm greatly mistaken, something will happen to that girl we saw, wherever she may be. Now, you remember what I say." He took up the cup of tea which the man across the table had pushed toward him. "Here's to the young lady of the axle grease and the jack," he said, smiling.

"À la belle demoiselle du jacque," replied Burgess, politely lifting his cup.

All the members of the Hyde household gathered round the Hyde supper-table that evening, — Darius himself, and his two nieces, and Hiram, the hired man, and Mary, the hired girl. The other

farm hand whom Darius regularly employed lived and took his meals elsewhere.

Darius sat at the head of the table. He was a mild-mannered old man of no radical characteristic except a dislike of the radical, always gently conciliatory, viewing the world through kind but rather weak eyes, doing his duty as he saw it, but not seeing it very clearly. He was quite thin and seemed oddly shrunken by his sixty-five years of incessant toil, and under his gray beard you could see the flabby folds of dry, yellow skin around the lower part of his throat; his skin and his wearing apparel seemed much too large for him. He had one single gesture of which he made frequent use, — a curious passing of his hand across his forehead; one could not tell whether it was an involuntary motion denoting a tacit subservience to something stronger than himself or whether he suffered from purely physical causes. His hands and his mentality trembled a little.

Opposite him sat his elder niece, Miss Elizabeth, halfway along the evolution of an old maid, always a maiden but not yet a spinster, as one roughly considers. Her age was an indefinite suspicion of thirty; the two children between her and Eleanor were dead. To Eleanor she took not the least resemblance, — her hair and eyes were black,

she was tall and awkward and sharply angular, and her dress and her features were both of them severe. Her opinions were definite and vigorous, and usually correct; Miss Elizabeth was credited by the local community with lashings of horse-sense.

Hiram, the hired man, sat on one side of the table, and by an overwhelming attention to his victuals made up excusably for what he lacked in conversational contribution or grace of manner. Eleanor sat on the other side, and with her sat Mary, the hired girl, who kept continually getting up to regulate the course of the meal. The house possessed a dining room, but Darius and his followers ate in the kitchen by custom, convenience, and choice. Most of the dialogue was crossed over the hired girl between Miss Elizabeth and her younger sister; Hiram's maxillary gymnastics occupied his whole attention; the opinions of old Darius were limited both in scope and in interest; Mary was by no means reticent, — she could have gushed with small talk, the smaller the better, — but her official duties interrupted the sequence of her remarks to a discouraging extent.

The subject of compelling attention at this meal was the funeral which Hiram had attended that afternoon. The deceased had been employed by a neighbor, and Mary was greatly absorbed in the

details of the obsequies. She wanted to know what the minister said, how the corpse looked, whether its relatives were present, who was chief mourner, how many were there, who wept and what they wore, and every telling incident throughout the conduct of the whole painful affair. At last Eleanor slid into the conversation through an aperture of silence.

"There were two young men here this afternoon," she remarked carelessly.

Her casually delivered announcement met an instant interest. Visitors to the Hyde farm were infrequent at best; the age, sex, and number in this case made it one of particular attention. Miss Elizabeth had by no means reached the place where romance took a place in the background of her affairs; Mary and Hiram were curious; even Darius raised his mild old eyes from his plate with a show of concern.

"Tryin' to sell su'thin'?" he inquired, jerking Miss Elizabeth rudely back into the paths of the practical.

"No," said Eleanor, and her sister was reassured into mounting query.

"Give me s'more beans, please," said Hiram, stonily ignoring the possibility of romance. His request broke the chain for Mary, who pushed

back her wooden chair from the table and went over to the stove.

"What did they want?" asked Miss Elizabeth.

"Guess I'll hev a few more beans, too," said her uncle, pushing his plate forward.

"Their buggy had a hot box and they stopped to fix it," Eleanor replied. "It was something they had hired in town."

"Prob'bly from Jenkins — he's got rotten rigs," was Hiram's comment.

"Strangers, hey?" said Darius, dipping his bread in his cup of tea.

"Were they nice looking?" Miss Elizabeth inquired.

"Yes — rather nice. They were city men."

"Really? I wonder what they were doing up here so early in the season," the older girl went on.

"P'raps they were lookin' f'r a place f'r their fam'lies to spend th' summer," Mary suggested.

Eleanor smiled slightly and looked thoughtfully down at the hemmed edge of the rough table-cloth, which shone very white in the lamplight.

"No, I don't think so," she said.

"More beans, please," interposed Hiram.

"Why not? What were they like?" Miss Elizabeth interrogated.

The girl wisely ignored the first question.

"They were rather pleasant. I think they tried to be agreeable. They talked a good deal of nonsense," she responded.

"Talked nonsense, hey? What do you mean by that?" inquired her uncle. Old and forceless as he was, he was alert to resent, constructively at least, any familiarity toward his young relative.

"Why, they just talked nonsense — that was all," Eleanor replied. Evidently she saw no ground for offence, and Darius, dimly realizing that he did not understand, was mollified, his swift suspicions slowly lapsing.

"Did they talk nonsense well?" asked the older girl.

"Yes, I think they did," her sister answered.

"Then they were probably very clever. Only very clever people can talk nonsense well," was the sage comment of Miss Elizabeth.

Her uncle, the hired girl, and the hired man received this statement in silence. It was beyond the scope of their comments or arguments. For all her common sense Miss Elizabeth occasionally advanced strange theories. Hiram pushed back his chair and began to fill a large pipe from a well-worn bag of tobacco.

"Did they get their buggy fixed up?" asked practical Darius, slowly eating prunes.

"Did you find out their names?" Miss Elizabeth inquired.

"Yes, they fixed it up. One of them was named Burgess," said Eleanor, "and the other was a Hamilton King."

"Hamilton King? Why, he's the novelist. I just read in the *Recorder* that he was staying at the inn. No wonder you thought he was very clever," said Miss Elizabeth.

"I never said I thought he was very clever," her sister retorted with a touch of asperity. "I merely said that he talked nonsense — pretty well. Not any better than his friend. Is he a novelist? I never heard of him. What did he write?"

"Why, he wrote *Gray Stars* and *The Fourth Favorite*."

"I never heard of either of them," said the girl, decidedly. She folded her napkin and put it into the ivory ring which bore her initials. Hiram had gone outside on the porch, and was blowing clouds of smoke into the air, his chair tipped back against the window. Under the sitting-room lamp old Darius was reading the before-mentioned *Burnham Recorder* through thick-rimmed spectacles. Mary, the hired girl, was commencing to wash the supper dishes at the sink.

"Are they any good?" asked Eleanor, indifferently.

"A lot of people seem to like them — I believe they are quite popular," Miss Elizabeth replied. "They don't really amount to much, but the girls are very attractive and the men are strong and clean and nice. And both the books I saw — I suppose he's written others — had pretty covers; that counts a lot, I should think."

"Yes, I should think so. I don't know but what I liked Mr. Burgess better," her sister remarked thoughtfully. Hiram, having finished his pipe, came in and took his hat from the peg, and went out the side door. The death of the sunset was faintly crimsoning the lowest west against rising clouds. He shut the door behind him and went up toward the barn.

"Mr. Burgess knew the Brinton girl I met at school," Eleanor continued.

"The one you used to tell us about — whose folks were so enormously rich?"

"Yes, the same one. They're coming to Burnham this summer."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Miss Elizabeth. "Isn't that fine?"

"Oh, I don't know," the younger sister responded diffidently. "May Brinton was quite

pleasant on slight acquaintance, but I scarcely knew her. I doubt whether she'll remember me here." She paused a moment. "Mr. Burgess said he was going to tell her that he'd seen me." She gave a little laugh, half wistful, half sceptical.

Old Darius had gone fast asleep under the shining lamp, his gray-bearded chin fallen down among the loose folds of yellowy skin at the bottom of his throat, his wrinkled eyelids tight shut behind his heavily rimmed spectacles, the *Burnham Recorder* lying in his lap. Mary, the hired girl, was moving noisily about in the woodshed. Outside, yellow moonlight had begun to spill through a windy sky of drifting scud. The sound of the hurrying brook came very faintly up through the orchard from the foot of the hill.

In the office of the Burnham Inn, King and Burgess sat before a cheerful, crackling fire of oak and hickory logs. The small cups of coffee which they had just finished drinking stood on a table beside them. Burgess was smoking a cigar; King affected a corn-cob pipe — he claimed that it put him more thoroughly in sympathy with the rural point of view.

"But you ought to take off that dinner coat and

put on blue overalls," Burgess protested. "Be consistent, man."

"In the first place I don't pretend to be consistent," King retorted, "and in the second place I don't believe you know what overalls are, else you would understand that under no conceivable conditions can they adequately supply the place of a dinner coat — or any other kind of coat that I've ever seen."

"Oh, shut up!" said Burgess.

Arkwright, the proprietor of the establishment, was sitting behind the desk making up his accounts.

"Do either o' you gentlemen know a Mr. John S. Brinton?" he inquired, looking over at them. "He's comin' here on the train from New York — ought to be here now. F'r a man who's supposed to have a pile o' money I must say he don't seem to have much gumption. Sent me word that I needn't get up any dinner f'r him — said he'd get his dinner on th' car. On th' car! Wonder 'f he thinks they run the Shecargo Ves*ti*buled Limited over this one-hoss road," said Arkwright, laughing heartily.

"He means his private car," said Burgess, taking the cigar out of his mouth.

It took a number of seconds for this explanation

to eat its way into the deliberate mental apparatus of the country hotel keeper, but its effect was impressive.

"My Lord!" said Arkwright, entirely taken aback. "His private car!" He sat for some moments in deep silence. "I'll sure have to get down to th' deepo to-morra' mornin' and have a squint at the darn thing." He was lost in meditation, scratching his ear softly with his pencil.

"Yes, I know him," Burgess answered the first question. He turned around from the fire and put a question in return.

"Do you know some people named Hyde that live a few miles west of here?"

"On the road to Perkins Mills?—where it turns north'ard up the hill—'bout three miles out?" inquired Arkwright.

"Yes, that's the place. Who are they?" Burgess queried.

"There's old man Hyde and his two nieces," the hotel keeper answered. "He's got quite a farm there—mostly pasture land. I b'lieve he's got some sort o' contract with th' dairy comp'ny here—sells 'em all his milk. He's a nice man, but he's getting pretty old, and he ain't very smart any more."

"You say his nieces live with him?" Bur
asked.

"Yes. Their father, — old Darius's you
brother that was — hed all th' brains o' the far
but he warn't a practical man — he was allus f
muxin' 'round with darn-fool inventions 'nd s
'Nd when he died, he didn't have hardly anyt
left but these two girls — they've lived with t
uncle ever since."

"How old are they?" was the next questio
Burgess.

"Lemme see. Elizabeth's gettin' on now
wouldn't like to say how old she might be. B
guess Eleanor's nineteen or twenty. They're b
well eddicated; Eleanor's been away to schoo
some swell place run by a fellow that was an
friend of her father's. I reckon he took her
that account. A lot o' folks 'round here thou
it was darn foolishness f'r Darius to let her wa
her time learnin' a lot of expensive flummery,
I guess it didn't hurt her none — she's a nice g
And pretty, too."

King and Burgess exchanged glances. T
explained Allingwood.

"Is Mr. Hyde well off?" King inquired.

"Oh, I s'pose he's fairly well fixed," the i
keeper responded. "I guess he makes a fa

good thing out of his farm, 'nd I guess he's got a little somethin' over besides — not very much, but enough f'r a rainy day, you know."

King was thinking that the presence of Eleanor Hyde might readily tend to make an uncle who was in the least appreciative somewhat optimistic regarding weather probabilities, when the door of the inn opened. A middle-aged gentleman, with a rather ruddy face, a short, stiff, brown mustache, and very keen and active eyes, entered the room. He wore a black felt hat and a very loose, light-colored, belted overcoat. He was followed by a young man, evidently of the locality, who carried a large valise.

"All right, John," said the new arrival to his baggage bearer. "Set it down." He produced from a pocket a coin and handed it to the young man with an adroitness which immediately showed him to be a person of much experience upon that especial gesture. "That'll do," he said, and the young man, evidently of the locality, awkwardly departed. Burgess had gotten up and crossed the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Brinton," he said.

The man in the baggy overcoat turned quickly around. His keen, restless eyes, which looked much younger than the rest of him, lighted up.

"Why, hello, Burgess!" he exclaimed heartily "Delighted to see you. I thought at first you were one of those cursed reporters. There was an interesting little mix-up in the A and I directorate yesterday, and they've hounded me all day to find out what was doing. How do you happen to be here?"

"Oh, I'm just wandering around with Hamilton King. This is my friend Mr. King, Mr. Brinton. And we stopped in here for a few days. It's very quiet—no one's arrived yet."

"Quiet, is it? Well, we'll fix all that a little later on," said the man in the slouch hat, laughing and shaking hands with the novelist. He turned to the interested Arkwright, who stood behind the desk. "You got my letter, proprietor?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Brinton," the innkeeper replied with the respect due the man who paid. "Your rooms are all ready for you." He pushed the register toward his guest, who signed his name in a firm rapid hand with a whisking flourish at the end.

"The faster you write the harder it is for the crooks to forge your signature," he explained to the fascinated Arkwright, who had commented upon the speed with which the pen had travelled across the page.

The proprietor now rang three sharp strokes on a large bell, and a porter appeared.

"Sam, take this bag to number seven. You've had your dinner, Mr. Brinton?" he inquired solicitously.

"Yes." He turned to the young men. "I had company. Great fun! The train was an hour late — it always is on this road — and there was a gentleman and his wife on board that I got talking to. It seemed they were afraid they wouldn't have time for supper and then get to some Methodist fair, so I had 'em both into the car to dinner. And what's more, I sent my three colored men — the crew of the car, you know — along to the fair, besides. They can sing pretty well, and they're regular wonders at buck-and-wing dancing. I told them to get good and busy, and I shouldn't be surprised if they livened the fair up considerably."

The idea of the three dusky servitors of Mr. Brinton's private car suddenly casting themselves upon a peaceful gathering of inflexible Connecticut Methodists, under orders to buck-and-wing the assemblage into an attitude of responsive geniality struck King and Burgess as one of the most extraordinary things of which they had ever heard. They could dimly fancy the situation which must necessarily ensue, — the grinning black men roar-

ing their syncopations and shuffling with loc vigor before the audience of astonished religic rustics. The innocent couple, whom chance h cast into Mr. Brinton's hospitable Pullman a who had indirectly precipitated the unsought ent tainment, would probably be excommunicated fr the congregation at a special meeting called f the very purpose early the next morning. T negroes, by strict and express command of th master, would doubtless inflict their uproaric antics with no regard whatsoever to the desire their auditors and observers; King and Burge only hoped that they would restrain themselves much as possible.

"I shouldn't be surprised if they livened th old prayer-meeting-auction — or whatever it is up considerably," repeated the entertainment cc tributor, pleased at the consciousness of havi done a good deed.

"I shouldn't be surprised at all," King agre politely.

"We might all drop in a little later on," su gested the cheerful Mr. Brinton.

Burgess reflected that their timely arrival mig be the means of saving the lives of three more less innocent and entirely well-meaning black me but King declined to take the chance.

"I don't think I'll go," he said. "You see, if I appeared at a country Methodist fair in a dinner coat, the people there would think I was trying to come it over them, and I'm too tired to change my clothes."

"We couldn't hope to compete with your chain gang — I should say, train gang," Burgess remarked affably.

Mr. Brinton laughed.

"Suit yourselves, boys," he said. He turned to Arkwright. "In the meantime, landlord, if you have something down cellar that you've been keeping cool a long time, we might have a couple of quarts elevated to the level of this polished table I see before me. And landlord, put on a glass for yourself."

III

THE following morning King awoke early a
set out for a walk before breakfast. It had rain
during the night, but day had broken clear a
soft, and the first sunlight was touching the ea
with vernal warmth. As yet, however, raindro
shone thick on the turf, and trunks of trees we
black with wet in the shadows, and shimmeri
pools of dark water stood on the hard-trodd
dirt paths, and the road was a ribbon of soft m
between broad borders of drenched, browni
grass.

King's way led down the main street of Bur
ham. That main street was always a delight
him. It ran along the level crest of the hill, lo
and wide and straight from end to end; in t
centre was a broad roadway, then came on ea
side the strip of grass, then the rows of tremendo
elms that towered aloft in the dignity of a centu
and over, beneath them the firm earth footpath
and then the high lines of box hedge before th
trim house yards. And before each yard a woode

gate would swing with a final click, disclosing a box-bounded path leading up to the house door. The houses, most of which faced sideways, with low gable ends and shingle roofs that slanted down to the street, were rangy and comfortable-looking; they had white sides and rough roofs and green shutters. Around each front door was always some quaintly patterned design in leaded glass, and on the door a shiny brass knocker. Honeysuckles and wistaria and lilacs and crimson ramblers and morning-glories were, in season, trimmed up the shady porches. At one end of the street and looking down its centre stood a white wooden church, its graceful spire tapering loftily into the blue sky; and behind it was the quiet churchyard, where the fathers of the village slept. Nearer the middle of the town, where the main street was crossed by the next important way, rose the tall liberty pole, guarded by a circular picket fence. Though it was yet quite early, people were moving about, and occasionally a buggy or a buckboard splashed lumberingly along through the mud.

King came back to the inn, and stood for a moment in admiration of the beds of hyacinths and tulips and crocuses and yellow jonquils which Arkwright had set out. Then he went into the office and there found Burgess awaiting him.

"Good morning," he said.

"What do you think of that?" Burgess repli pointing.

In one corner of the hotel office was stacke most extraordinary collection of decorative a useful merchandise. There were several s cushions, the most notable one being bri green and lavishly embroidered with gold, a there were two rag rugs very neatly pieced gether, and a quantity of genuine maple sug and a fearful oil painting which showed th stolid cows standing in an unnatural brook neath an impossible willow tree, and a sm cuckoo clock, and three large layer-cakes, and garish Japanese kimono, and a half-dozen e broidered doilies, and a backgammon board, a a stuffed trout in a glass case.

"What in the devil—" King began, but t other man broke in.

"Mr. Brinton," he managed to articulate.

"Oh!" King saw a light. "He *did* go to t fair without us, didn't he?"

"Go to the fair? Hasn't he brought most of back with him? If Mr. Brinton were a Methodi he'd be in danger of being made a lay bishop— there is any such thing—this morning."

"Perhaps his purchases were a sort of expiato

offering for having inflicted his three dancing coons on the august assemblage," King suggested.

"Not a bit of it. The Nubians made a great hit. And after Mr. Brinton arrived he collected four young men who belonged to the church choir, — he has a fair baritone voice himself — and along with his waiters he organized what he called the Black and White Octette to sing 'Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground,' and 'Down on de Mississippi Floating,' and all those things."

The picture of the New York capitalist, standing up with his three colored servants and four severe and serious-faced young Methodists and pouring forth impromptu melody into the ears of the surprised gathering of country people, was too much for King, and he sat down, laughing helplessly.

"I guess he did stir things up all right, as he said he would," he commented. And just then the man under discussion came briskly into the room.

"Hello, boys," he said, rubbing his hands together. "Fine morning, isn't it?" He glanced toward the astonishing collection of merchandise in the corner. "Been admiring my purchases?" he inquired. "I picked up some rare bargains last night," he said, winking solemnly at King.

"You ought to have come along. Nice crow
a little stiff and formal at first, but when they
convinced that I was really all right, they
very agreeable indeed."

The two young men had little difficult
believing this; they wondered how much the
viction had cost their friend.

"You seem to have bought quite extensi
Mr. Brinton," King observed politely.

"Oh, a few little trifles that took my fan
the plutocrat responded easily. Just then his
unfortunately caught the painting of the unha
looking cattle anchored under the impossible
low in the leaden water. "I'm afraid I'll
have to burn up that infernal — I should say e
nal — masterpiece," he remarked thoughtfully.
really can't keep it myself; the local artist's f
ings would be lacerated unless I hung it, an
can't do that. And I wouldn't give it away
a cross-eyed street-cleaner," he added reflectiv

His hearers agreed perfectly with him in
estimate of the merits of the piece.

"But here's a thing," said Mr. Brinton, "t
I really like." And he pulled out the gar
kimono from under a layer-cake. Its pattern
a series of yellow dragons carrying in their mou
bouquets of pink blossoms, all this on a pur

background. "I thought of presenting that to my Japanese butler, but on second thought I believe I'll keep it myself."

Burgess was tempted to recommend to Mr. Brinton the indulgence of an additional thought, the result of which would doubtless be that the kimono would be consigned to the same fiery and appropriate fate as the picture of the stolid cows. But the proprietor of the garment under discussion picked it up and draped it rakishly over one shoulder.

"Now, *I* call that really decorative," he said with considerable satisfaction. "And I don't think I ever saw anything quite like it before," he remarked, tossing it over the cuckoo clock.

King and Burgess felt inclined to concede that it was in a way perfectly unique. At this point the innkeeper entered.

"Arkwright," said the plutocrat, "have all this stuff taken up to my rooms. You can keep the backgammon board yourself — I bought it especially for you and your guests," he stated with a happy inspiration. "And Arkwright, tell your people to be very careful not to mix this collection into my ordinary clothes and things. Now, is breakfast ready? Good!" He led the way to the dining room, King and Burgess following.

"I had the very devil of a time getting stuff back here from the church," he confess his young friends. "It was just about all those three fellows from the car and I could c And the night was black as the inside of a l cat — they don't light the street here afte o'clock, it seems. I'm afraid that cuckoo clo out of commission for good — I fell over a l block and landed on it." He sat down; the na commander, at the head of a table, and the y men took their places on either side of him.

"I suppose I might have left what I boug be sold over again," he continued; "but tha my thinking, is a poor idea. Either give then money or take the goods — to buy a lot of and then not take it is poor business and charity, too, in my opinion. Pass the ora King."

During the course of the breakfast, Bur who had thought the matter carefully over, d mined to take the step upon which he had meditating. He decided to mention the nam Eleanor Hyde to Mr. Brinton, and follow up affair.

"While King and I were out driving yeste we met a school friend of your daughter's, remarked.

"'Now, *I* CALL THAT REALLY DECORATIVE.'"

"Is that so? Friend of May's? An Allingwood girl?" asked the capitalist.

"Miss Eleanor Hyde," said Burgess.

"Don't just now remember her — I don't recall May's saying anything about her. Has her father got a place here?" Mr. Brinton inquired.

"No. She lives with her uncle, who is a farmer and lives about three miles from town."

The man at the head of the table looked up from his oatmeal.

"What's that? A farmer's niece who went to Allingwood?" he said in some surprise.

Burgess explained the whole situation as the hotel proprietor had told it to him.

"We'll just have to look her up, I guess," said Mr. Brinton. The die was cast. "You say she's attractive?"

"Very," said Burgess, with some warmth.

"Extremely," replied King.

After breakfast the plutocrat lit a long black cigar and stood on the piazza, his feet apart, his hands in his pockets, his eyes half shut, and his head thrown back a little, drinking in the sunshine of the morning. Burgess produced a cigarette from his case; King, sitting on the piazza railing with his cap pulled over his eyes, went back to his corn-cob. Mr. Brinton was apprecia-

tively silent as long a time as his nature ever pe mitted him to be. Finally he wrenched himse loose from the charm of the sunlight.

"Have you chaps anything to do this mor ing?" he asked.

The inquiry met two negatives.

"Well, how would you like to go and look ove the place I've hired?" said the magnate. "I' going to have a few things done to it and a fe changes made, and I'd be glad of your advice."

The young men expressed their entire willin ness to donate it.

"Good! I ordered a two-seated buckboard an a team — that'll just hold us. It ought to be her in four minutes," said Mr. Brinton, glancing at th elaborate stop-watch which he affected, and h went to get his overcoat.

"Isn't he a wonder?" said Burgess to King, i frank admiration. "Did you ever see any one wh got action out of things faster than John S.?"

"He certainly is," King replied with feeling "That idea of his in sending on his three double shuffling waiters as an advance-guard to hold th attention of the crowd until he himself could sai in at the psychological moment and buy every thing he saw — well, it must have astonished those Methodists some."

"If he takes up our friend Miss Hyde with the same vigor that he showed toward the church fair people, there's no telling where she'll end," Burgess commented.

"Well, you've put it up to him, all right," said the novelist.

"He can give her the velocity, — and he's liable to, — but she'll have to manage the direction herself," his friend returned.

Mr. Brinton came out, wearing the baggy, belted overcoat. He lit a fresh cigar, and his active eyes discerned the ordered buckboard coming up the street.

"Arkwright, we'll none of us be back to lunch; these gentlemen will take lunch with me on the car," he called to the proprietor. "And if a man brings a coon in a cage, pay him three dollars and a half and put it down in your barn." He explained to his guests. "A man at the fair offered to sell me a coon that he had at home, and I thought that some night after we moved up here we could take those darkies from the car as a nucleus, and let it loose and have a regular old-fashioned coon hunt." Evidently Mr. Brinton's purchases had not been confined to articles actually displayed before him.

"Those three men on your car must be simply

invaluable to you," King ventured. "Have y
had them long?"

"Ever since I made my money," said John
Brinton, simply and cheerfully. "That is to s
since I made enough to keep a car in commiss
all the time. Yes, I've got those three trained
be pretty useful. The cook's a first-class cr
country rider and makes an excellent groom
my daughter, and they're all of them good cadd
when we strike a golf links, and Billy the wai
can get up in a canoe as close to a deer as a
guide I ever saw. He's a pretty good barber a
chauffeur and a fair ventriloquist, too. And
course at cake-walking and that sort of th
they're past masters. Yes, they're pretty talent
those chaps; I think a lot of them. And he
the buckboard."

This vehicle, pulled by a stocky team of coun
bays with shaggy fetlocks, drove up to the h
steps.

"Get up in front, Burgess," said Mr. Brint
"King, jump in behind with me. Driver, go
to the Robertson place." The buckboard mo
out the curving driveway and up the muc
street.

The Robertson place, which the New Yor
had leased for the season, was the exhibit

estate of Burnham. Mr. Robertson was an enterprising gentleman of some capital and vast assurance, who had gone down from his native village of Burnham into the city, and there, by an odd combination of recklessness, sagacity, and the most extraordinary good luck, had for several years furnished to the hospitable metropolitans an ever entertaining demonstration of how a fortune may be doubled over night. But one day an unhappy inability to deliver a number of thousand shares of a certain stock, which he had inadvertently sold short, had resulted in his stepping up and leaving a large portion of his fortune in the hands of the astute gentlemen who had watched his tumultuous ascent with considerable interest and waited with cynical patience for just such an opportunity to present itself. And the spectacular estate, which the fortune-tossed Robertson had established in the double purpose of his own enjoyment and of impressing his old fellow-townsmen, he had been glad of an opportunity to lease to Mr. Brinton.

The buckboard drove in between two handsome stone gateposts and up a driveway of crushed bluestone which looked like the roadbed of a first-rate railway before the tracks and ties had been laid. The driveway was fringed by dogwoods in

white blossom. The prospective tenant dre
a note-book and a pencil.

"I want flower beds on both sides of the
all the way up to the house," said Mr. Bı
"Geraniums — good red ones — maybe t
out of fashion, but I like 'em; they're harc
they're cheerful, too; none of your pale ı
orchids for *me*. Now what do you think
color of the house?"

The two young men saw no particular obj
to it.

"I don't care much for that color, myself,
the commander, regarding it critically. "I
that a gray like that one is pretty sad, n
But perhaps it wouldn't really be worth wl
change it for one season. Fresh paint a
smells, and besides, this Robertson fellow
not like the new color I put on, and I'd h
go to the trouble of painting it over again
fall when I left. I guess I'll just leave
way it is."

His guests commended his conservatism.

"Oh, I want a lot of colored electric lig
the piazzas," Mr. Brinton remembered.
mustn't forget that." The caretaker ap
from around a corner. "Here's the fell
show us through, I guess. Hop out, l

They all dismounted from the buckboard and entered the house.

Mr. Robertson, when he built, had evidently put an indefinitely extensive roll of his paper profits at the disposal of some eminent architect and decorator and furnisher, for the place was done in the most elaborate good taste; but in almost every room the new tenant saw some detail to be changed, some omission to be remedied. He commented most adversely on the size and the lack of illumination in the swimming pool, and over the limited area of the wine-cellar his dissatisfaction rose almost to the level of genuine anger.

"My architect had his way on my city house, but I know a few things about country houses, and I'm going to have *my* way in the few little changes I make here. Now look at that skimpy little closet! Call that a wine-cellar?" he commented scornfully. "They ought to have put a sign on it—'For Medicinal Purposes Only'—that's about the size of it. Well, fortunately there's lots of room underground; one's seldom restricted in making a country cellar—I can dig it out for a quarter of a mile if I please." Numerous items were jotted down in the note-book as they journeyed through the establishment.

Under the guidance of the bewildered caret who had not hazarded a suggestion since his first remark in difference with one of Mr. Brir remarkable plans had met the rebuff of a cont tuous and icy ignorement, they visited the outl ings. That structure which contained a bo alley, a squash court, and shower baths met a the first unqualified approbation of the prosp proprietor.

"Now this is really something like it," h with marked favor. "This Robertson f actually seemed to have some sense, afte although I suppose when he built this pla was so busy making money he hadn't ti spend it intelligently. That's the way with of people. But this shower-bath arrange here is just fine; it's a wonder he didn't put of them in the house. I suppose he must expected about half his guests to crawl the back stairs in bathrobes and clean up i swimming pool."

Then they went through the stable an carriage house.

"You won't have room for all your autom here, will you, Mr. Brinton?" inquired Bu

"Oh, lord, no!" responded the comma "I've hired the old Town Hall for a garage."

They came back to the buckboard, which still stood under the porte-cochère, the driver sitting with one leg across the other, flicking aimlessly with his whip over the snowy blossoms of a dogwood. Mr. Brinton pulled out his elaborate watch.

"Eight minutes past eleven," said he. "We'll have time to drive around and see a little of the country before lunch." An inspiration came to him. "Say," he proposed, "we might go and call on that friend of my daughter's that you were telling me about, Burgess. There's nothing like having an objective point of some sort to put the element of interest into a trip. How far off did you say she lived?"

"About three miles, I should say," the young man replied.

"Well, that's where we go, then," said the commander, with brisk decision. "Tell the driver where it is."

"You know where Darius Hyde lives?" Burgess asked the man with the reins.

"Old feller that runs a dairy farm on th' road to Perkins Mills — 'bout halfway?"

"Yes, that's the place."

They turned west off the main street, and the team of country bays began to jog steadily down the long muddy hill. Practical Mr. Brinton lighted

another black cigar that he might the more sy pathetically appreciate the beauties of the count side. The swamp maples flaring aflame on t wood edges, the shad bushes with their sno clusters swung above the brook, the aureate tou of the marsh marigolds, the yellowy birches a gray-golden willow buds and purple-tasselled ald — none of these Brinton knew, or could ha known. The buckboard went splashing and grir ing on along the rutted, stony road, and presen it turned in at the Hyde farm.

At the foot of the piazza steps the three visit alighted. They went up on the piazza; there w no door-bell or knocker, but Burgess rapp sharply on the shut door. There was no sponse — he rapped again. Finally Mary, t hired girl, appeared, and from the manner which she unswung the portal, it was evident tl this means of entrance was infrequently affect by comers to the house. She stood in the doorw suspicious, silent, ill at ease.

"Is Miss Eleanor Hyde at home?" Burge asked politely.

Just then Mary's eye had caught Mr. Brinto baggy, belted overcoat. She gazed at it, instan fascinated, answering the question and yet qu powerless to regard the questioner.

"I guess so — I'll see." She went away, leaving the strangers standing on the porch, looking into the shadowy front hall.

Presently Eleanor came. As she approached them through the dim doorway Burgess and King realized in a flash that their former measure of her attractiveness had not been due to a mere chance of pose, a momentary grace of discovery; this girl's charm was real and convincing and enduring. With her brown eyes, a little questioning, again seeming rather wonderful, with her soft complexion and smooth brown hair, and her straight, slender, yet strong young figure, and slim hands, and the quiet ease of her manner — all in all, the young men came to a rapid realization that their estimate had been, if in any error, too low. Mr. Brinton, who had more or less skill in weighing the merits of appearance, had drawn his conclusions along an independent similar level. Meanwhile the girl was doubtless wondering at their so speedy return, and perhaps evidenced this in her look. Burgess explained.

"Miss Hyde, may I present Mr. Brinton?" he said. "You remember we were speaking of him yesterday afternoon, and yesterday evening he quite unexpectedly arrived in town."

"A clear case of *deus ex machina* — if Mr.

Brinton had ridden into Burnham on the engine," said King.

"Just ran up to look over a place I've taken for the summer. We had a little spare time, so we drove out this way. Burgess tells me that you're a friend of my daughter's," the capitalist explained affably.

The girl frowned a little, almost unconsciously. She disliked to think that she was extending her acquaintance on so superficial and questionable a basis. As a matter of fact the others had forced her into a sort of constructive acceptance of a foundation upon which they themselves were busily erecting a top-heavy structure. Eleanor, however, would not unprotestingly accept their ingeniously distorted point of view.

"I knew your daughter very slightly," she said, rather coolly. Then it occurred to her that her disclaimer of intimacy with Miss Brinton might be deemed an expression of inhospitality to the strangers. "Won't you all come in?" she asked.

Mr. Brinton, having taken a second careful observation of his young hostess during the brief trip into the sitting room, chose to ignore completely her disclaimer.

"May will be delighted to know that you are to be so near her," he remarked cordially.

Eleanor thought that Miss Brinton's delight would be highly unlikely to burst beyond the bounds of easy control.

"I shall be glad to meet her again," she replied evenly. "Although I doubt whether she would remember me," she added, on the verge of sincerity, for her acquaintance with the other girl had really been most casual.

The commander laughed easily at this suggestion, tossing its possibility lightly aside.

"I guess there's no danger of that," he said. "Why, you were at Allingwood together, weren't you?"

"For a little while," Eleanor admitted. "Your daughter left school a few months after I entered," she explained.

"May thinks a great deal of Allingwood. She's always glad to see an old Allingwood girl anywhere," the father of the young lady declared.

Eleanor reflected that Miss Brinton during her school days had manifested no tumultuous enthusiasm toward her companions — in fact she remembered her chiefly as a rather haughty girl, expensively dressed, possessing an apparently inexhaustible supply of money and mixed chocolates — a forbidden delicacy — and confining her confidences and intimacies to three or four other

girls of her own sort and set. Still, under Miss Brinton's exclusive manner might have smouldered a genuine democratic spirit of school loyalty, which had fully developed only after departure; Eleanor was charitably willing to believe that this might have been the case.

"It's very nice in her to feel that way," she said.

The genial capitalist in his endeavor to promote the acquaintance along this line now overshot the mark a trifle.

"I think I've heard May speak of you, Miss Hyde," he ventured.

This was a complete falsehood and so highly improbable a one that the girl looked at him with some surprise at his temerity in putting it out. It was Mr. Brinton's first false step in contriving to fasten upon her an intimacy which he chose to insist had existed between her and his daughter. Her very modesty and lack of worldly self-assertiveness put her at a loss to understand his motives in desiring to assume this friendly relationship, but from a sense of sincerity she struggled to escape from his enmeshing implications.

"Really, I think you must be mistaken," she replied in grave protest. "She would have been most unlikely to have mentioned me. You see

we were there a very few months at the same time," she respecified her explanation at some pains.

"Ah, one makes friendships more rapidly than one realizes during school days," put in Burgess, coming to the rescue with a shaft of cheap, abstract sentimentality quite unusual for him.

"Really, I saw very little of Miss Brinton," Eleanor said.

The three callers seemed unanimous in considering this statement to be possibly a polite depreciation of an absolute intimacy, or — if it were true — a most unfortunate omission from the educational experience of the plutocrat's daughter.

"All the better, then, for us that we're to be here this summer," said Mr. Brinton, affably. "You and May are certain to see a lot of each other here, at any rate. She was a little opposed to coming up, because none of her particular friends were to be near her; she'll feel much more reconciled, I'm positive, when she hears that you are so close at hand."

It seemed to Miss Hyde that it was simply impossible to convince this energetic and affable gentleman that she and his daughter had not passed their school days on terms of heart-entwined intimacy. Evidently he had made up his mind to

assume that such an intimacy had existed, and it was clear to Eleanor that no amount of polite protestations on her part could unfix this determined assumption. She took refuge in the reflection that, upon the arrival of May herself, the truth would out and the thread of their acquaintance reveal its real slenderness. Meanwhile, it seemed useless to try and escape from the pose reluctant into which Mr. Brinton had forced her. King now sallied into the conversation.

"Your uncle and sister are away?" he asked.

"Yes. Uncle Darius has gone to Perkins Mills and Elizabeth is away for the day," the girl answered.

The commander now projected one of his inspirations, which was as surprising to his two companions as to his young hostess.

"That's too bad," he said regretfully; "I'm sorry not to have met them, and besides I had intended to ask you all to come in and take lunch with me on the car."

"The car?" inquired Eleanor, not understanding.

"I came up on my private car—it's down at the railroad station," Mr. Brinton explained.

"Oh!" The girl was enlightened.

"It's too bad the others are away," continued

the plutocrat. "However, *you'll* come, won't you?" he said cheerfully.

"Oh, I'm afraid I can't," Eleanor replied quickly. "I'm all alone here with the girl, you see."

"All the more reason why you should come with us," responded the businesslike Mr. Brinton. "Now, let me see — who shall we get to chaperon the party?" he remarked, absolutely ignoring Miss Hyde's previous declination of invitation and assuming her subsequent acceptance. "Of course I'm old enough to be your father — the fact that you and my daughter were schoolmates together would seem to indicate that pretty conclusively, but that's no use at all under modern standards of propriety. No one short of a great-grandfather will answer now, if he's a male — which he almost always is. Ah, I have it — Mrs. Purvis!"

"Who's Mrs. Purvis?" inquired King and Burgess, almost simultaneously. They were beginning to believe Mr. Brinton competent to cope with almost any novel situation, but his ability to secure in a strange town on a moment's notice a suitable chaperon for a luncheon startled them somewhat.

"Mrs. Purvis," answered the capitalist, "is the wife of the Methodist minister, and, so far as I could judge from my hasty conversation with her

at the fair last night, is a superior woman — most superior woman. She sold me the bac gammon board and the cuckoo clock," he e plained specifically to the young men. "You kno her, of course?" he said, turning to Miss Hyde.

"Oh, yes," replied the girl. "I know her."

"Good!" said the commander. "Then that settled." In his usual matter-of-fact manner h chose illogically to interpret her acknowledgme of her acquaintance with the minister's spouse a an acceptance of his invitation. Mr. Brinton hasty and hazardous leaps to desired conclusio sometimes bewildered those about him. "I telephone her right away to meet us at the ca She'll come, all right. May I use your telepho a second?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," said Eleanor, feeling herself qui helpless against this unusual gentleman's dete mination to carry her off. "We have no tel phone here."

"Then we'll just have to telephone Mrs. Purv from the first house on the way in that *has* g one," said the capitalist.

"I don't think the Purvises have one, either said his hostess.

A momentary shadow of annoyance crossed th face of Mr. Brinton; it was as if he had discovere

when it commenced raining that the umbrella he was carrying lacked both a cover and a handle.

"Well, it's all the more reason why we must start right away," he remarked, forgetting that no previous reason whatever for an immediate departure had been advanced. "We'll just have to pick up Mrs. Purvis on the way. And if we don't get there pretty soon, she'll be taking her lunch at home. So get your wraps, Miss Hyde, and we'll start right along."

He quite lost sight of the fact that the girl had once declined his invitation and had not since by any word implied a reversal of her determination. His confidence was, however, in this instance justified. Eleanor was interested in her three visitors, who were of a class she seldom saw, and she had never been on a private car. Her curiosity was aroused.

"You're sure about Mrs. Purvis?" she asked rather doubtfully.

"Not absolutely, of course," Mr. Brinton conceded. "We may not be able to find her. But I'll promise you this — I'll either get her or I'll get some one else just as good. I met a prize collection of energetic old ladies yesterday evening, any one of whom would fit in nicely. I don't remember any of their names at just this moment, but I guess I can find one of them."

IV

WHILE Eleanor was away preparing to accompany the three gentlemen to Burnham, King and Burgess found an opportunity to exchange confidences.

"Well, you're giving her a start, all right," King commented in an undertone. "Your friend here as a producer of the maximum velocity in the minimum time is certainly a great success."

"Isn't he, though?" said Burgess, with admira tion. "Did you ever see such a man? He's usually in the home stretch before the rest of th crowd have decided whether they'll enter or not This is just about the way he made a lot of hi money; he took it for granted, and people wer too surprised to protest or make him put it bacl Say, Mr. Brinton," he remarked in a low voice t that gentleman, who was standing on the oth side of the room, attentively examining an engra ing of President Lincoln and his Cabinet, "do y suppose your daughter and Miss Hyde ever kn each other at all?"

"Oh, lord, they must have *known* each other," the commander replied, turning around. "Of course I don't know exactly how well; I don't suppose they were as thick as thieves — in fact, I dare say they weren't nearly as thick as two average companionable thieves; but they seem to have been at the same school at the same time, and considering that was all I had to work on, I flatter myself I did fairly well, don't you think?"

Considering that he had almost forced the reluctant Miss Hyde into conceding a caloric friendship with a girl whom she actually regarded as a most casual and ephemeral acquaintance, added to his success in securing an unconditional acceptance of a once-declined invitation, the young men felt inclined to grant the justice of his assertion.

"I suppose May just knew her very slightly," continued Mr. Brinton. "May went around with a more expensive crowd than this girl could afford to trail with," he explained quite frankly; "but, good lord! what difference does that make to us? Not a bit. Say, this girl's all right, isn't she? I like her eyes quite a good deal."

King and Burgess emphatically agreed in his approbation of Miss Hyde, and just then Eleanor came down, wearing a brown jacket and a brown hat that toned admirably with her hair and the

eyes that had attracted the favorable comment the capitalist.

"All aboard!" said Mr. Brinton, holding o the door. They went down the steps, and apathetic driver pulled into place. The c mander glanced at his equipage.

"I'm afraid there isn't room for five in this ri he said. He addressed the driver. "I'm af you'll have to walk back."

The idea of trudging three miles over a bad r struck that individual with great disfavor. Besi it was clearly out of the line of his employme it was something which this dictatorial gentlen in the baggy overcoat had no right to demand t he should do.

"I guess there's room f'r ev'rybody if you squeeze a bit," he remarked, without moving.

"Yes. But I don't care to be squeezed," s Mr. Brinton, curtly. Still the driver made motion; he seemed to consider the matter sett but as a concession to his patron he projecte curt explanation of his inactivity.

"I'm not goin' to walk back to town," he sta with surly defiance. "It ain't what I was hi for. I was hired to drive you 'round."

Then what seemed to the others to be a n remarkable thing happened. Mr. Brinton's

terest in the affair suddenly centred for the moment his entire attention upon his insubordinate employee. He evinced no trace of anger or surprise; he did not raise his voice the fraction of a tone; he merely brought to a focus upon a weak character the constant determination of a strong man and a master to have his will in every detail of his desires, however trifling or trivial the detail might be. His keen eyes contracted to pin-points, and seemed to shoot command at the obstinate countryman.

"Get out of that wagon," he said in a perfectly level voice without a trace of asperity, in the matter-of-fact manner in which he had been previously speaking, but steadily regarding the man in the buckboard.

The effect of this abrupt order was both instantaneous and startling. There had been no threat of enforcement, but the surly opposition of the driver seemed all at once to shrivel up and wilt away before the hidden force brought against it. The resolution of Mr. Brinton's will seemed to twist into the man's very soul and compel him to move. To the astonishment of the beholders he resentfully and reluctantly clambered out and went to the horses' heads, grumbling. As an illustration of the power of personality the victory of the capitalist

had been remarkable. The girl stepped lightl into the rear seat, and Mr. Brinton took the dri place.

"Burgess, get in behind with Miss Hyde,' said. King climbed up beside the comman They pulled away down the hill, the driver, dued but still surly, muttering as he saw them appear in the orchard.

"We'll just have to hurry up to catch Mrs. vis," Mr. Brinton remarked with renewed nature, as they clattered over the little bridge out into the main road. He touched the hc with the whip, silently regretting the lack of of his touring-cars. "What time do you sup she has lunch?"

"She probably has her dinner in the middl the day," Eleanor replied. "Most people arc here do," she added.

"Oh, yes — surely," Mr. Brinton respon "I'd almost forgotten the custom," he said a getically. "It's a very good custom, too. must just hurry up, then," — and he flicked country team sharply.

The country team put their low-checked h down and went steadily on, and the ground tween the Hyde place and Burnham was ra covered.

"Which house does Mrs. Purvis live in?" inquired the capitalist, turning around in his seat.

"The low white one just beyond the church," Eleanor answered, and presently they drew up before it.

"Hold the horses, will you, King?" the commander said, and he leaped agilely out and hurried up the front walk. In a few moments he returned, an expression of disappointment and perplexity on his ruddy face.

"She's gone away for the day," he announced in some annoyance. "But don't worry," he hastened to reassure Miss Hyde. "I said that if I didn't get her I'd get you some one else just as good; and I will." He pondered, standing with one foot on the muddy hub of the front wheel.

"I was introduced to a whole regiment of A 1 chaperons at that fair last night," he said thoughtfully; "but somehow or other I seem to have missed getting their names; you see I didn't anticipate that I'd have any immediate use for them — I could scarcely have foreseen anything of this sort. Whoa, there!" he remarked to the nigh horse, which had lashed around with its tail and caught a button of his baggy overcoat. Untan-

gling himself, he looked hopefully up at the girl i the rear seat.

"Suppose you name over some of the leadin Methodist ladies of this town," he proposed. " might remember the names of some of them if heard them a second time."

At this somewhat peculiar demand Eleanc hesitated. She was not herself a Methodist, an she was not at all certain of her ability to classif and arrange the women of Burnham on sectaria lines; however, she attempted to comply with th request of her new acquaintance. She called off th names of several estimable females whom she coı sidered it likely that Mr. Brinton had encountere the previous evening. The first three passed witl out response from his memory, but upon mentio of the fourth he brightened.

"Mrs. Sturtevant?" he said. "Thin, angula old party, with big teeth, and gray and yello streaks in her hair?"

This description, although scarcely flatterin was sufficiently vivid and convincing for Eleanc to admit the identification.

"And she lives right next door, too," she sai hopefully.

"Good!" said the commander, and he starte forthwith toward the Sturtevant residence.

In a few minutes he came out again, with renewed concern and the wrong result.

"She isn't in, either," he said. "I always used to think the women of New England models of domesticity," he remarked, somewhat reproachfully and with a trace of irritation, to Miss Hyde. "My opinion is rapidly changing; don't they ever stay home for lunch — that is, I mean dinner? And can you recollect any other leading Methodists? I'm sorry to trouble you, and I don't like to restrict you in this way; it seems atrociously narrow and bigoted to refuse to accept any one but a Methodist as chaperon — but as a matter of fact my acquaintance among the ladies of this place is confined absolutely to that particular denomination."

The rest of the party laughed. Meanwhile Eleanor had recalled another Wesleyan leader.

"Did you meet Mrs. Al Squires there?" she asked. "Very stout and quite jolly-looking?"

Mr. Brinton remembered her with enthusiasm.

"Surely," he said. "She's all right. She's great fun, and a thorough business woman, too. She sold me enough maple sugar to stock a wholesale grocery. Where does she live?"

"Over the other side of town," Eleanor answered.

"Over the other side we go, then," responded the capitalist, getting in and touching up the team.

In a few minutes they came to their destination, and Mr. Brinton went hurriedly to the door. Presently he emerged triumphant.

"She's coming," he announced. "I dragged her away from her own lunch — that is, dinner. I must say that it had begun to look as though this house-to-house canvass was going to result in our all going hungry," he remarked with some relief. He measured the buckboard critically with his eye.

"Say, Burgess," he said, "I'm afraid I'll just have to ask you to walk down to the car. Have you seen Mrs. Squires? I guess she tips the scales at an even three hundred, and I'm none too sure of the stability of this rig. Miss Hyde, will you come in front with me? — the old lady can get into that rear seat more easily than into this one.'

"Don't you want me to walk down, too?' inquired King, in some apprehension.

"Not at all," replied the commander, with decision. "Who's to help Mrs. Squires in if you leave? Say, Burgess," he called to the young man, who had already started down the sidewalk "if you get there first, tell the men to set five places. I told them last night I'd bring some people to lunch, but I didn't say how many," he explained to King and the girl.

"All right," Burgess called back.

When Mrs. Squires appeared, it was quite evident that Mr. Brinton had by no means exaggerated her weight; in fact his guess of three hundred pounds struck King as having been surprisingly conservative. The lady under discussion seemed to fill laterally the whole of her capacious doorway as she passed through it, and as she lumbered briskly down her front doorpath, it occurred to King that discretion pointed toward his assisting her into the vehicle and then himself proceeding to the car on foot. But the capitalist would permit nothing of the sort. He introduced King and Mrs. Squires, and the fat lady greeted Eleanor effusively.

"It jus' goes to show how small the world reely is," she remarked with more geniality than originality. "Here's Mr. Brinton been a-tellin' me that you was his daughter's most intimate friend at that school you went to. Ain't it funny, now, that you and him sh'd meet this way up here?"

Then by a tremendous effort Mrs. Squires with a great upward tidal heave managed to hurl herself clumsily into the rear seat, which sagged ominously under her. King reluctantly followed, seating himself gingerly, and the curving buckboard moved warily onward.

"And ain't it funny you never met Mr. Brinton

before, seein' you roomed two years with his only child?" commented Mrs. Squires to Eleanor, settling down into her place.

This specific fabrication of the plutocrat's struck Miss Hyde with some dismay. She quite failed to discern the humor in her having heretofore failed to make Mr. Brinton's acquaintance; it seemed to her neither amusing nor notable. And in view of this elaborate misconstruction of their true relations she considered with considerable embarrassment the probable effect of Miss Brinton's ultimate arrival. It was unlikely that their relations would be any closer than they had been at Allingwood, and this would leave Eleanor open to the suspicion that she had endeavored to magnify in Mr. Brinton's eyes the regard in which she was held by his daughter, or else to the equally unpleasant suspicion that the young heiress had chosen to cut away from her former friend. At any rate the true limits of their acquaintance were bound eventually to be disclosed, and the alternative reasons which people would take up to explain the lack of intimacy were almost equally humiliating. Unconsciously Eleanor frowned a little, and with ample cause. She could see no cogent reason why this gentleman, who seemed to be attempting to be agreeable to her, should

continue to try and fasten upon her a spurious relationship, which was certain to be troublesome to her when its falsity became apparent. She was annoyed at his odd insistence upon his groundless theory.

"You must have misunderstood," she said firmly but quite futilely. "I never roomed with Miss Brinton at all." But her disclaimer went totally unheeded as the party arrived at the railroad station.

"Here we are!" said the commander, as he swept up to the platform with a flourish that almost overturned the overloaded buckboard. "Mrs. Squires, let me present my friend, Mr. Burgess. Burgess, just help Mrs. Squires out, will you?"

Alongside the level of the platform the disembarkation of the ponderous chaperon was accomplished. An interested youth with bare feet sat on a baggage truck, chewing a toothpick and critically contemplating the operation. Mr. Brinton addressed him.

"Got anything to do, Pete?" he inquired. "No?" He extracted a coin from his pocket. "Then take back this rig; I don't know who owns it — you can probably find out. And tell them to send it down here at three o'clock — Mr.

Brinton. Three o'clock." He surrendered the reins and stepped out. "There's the car," he told his guests, pointing down the platform, at the end of which stood the *Mercury*, with a thin wisp of blue smoke melting from its squat stove-pipe into the sunshine. The party all walked over toward it.

Mr. Brinton diplomatically fell behind and compared with careful eye the dimensions of Mrs. Squires and the car stairway.

"I don't know," he remarked in a dubious aside to King; "she's a nice woman, but I'm not sure but what Mrs. Purvis or Mrs. Sturtevant would have done better for a job of this sort. I suppose I *could* take the door off its hinges," he speculated.

The same difficulty became immediately apparent to his weighty guest.

"Mercy sakes, Mr. Brinton!" she exclaimed, regarding the parsimonious passage with dismay; "do you expec' me to crawl up that little narrow place?"

"I certainly do, madam," replied her host, firmly. "Don't worry — you can make it. I have confidence in you. Billy!" he called, and one of his three versatile servitors responded.

At the dignity of being addressed as "madam," the pride of enjoying Mr. Brinton's confidence,

and the reassuring sight of the smiling tenor of the previous evening, Mrs. Squires's spirits returned.

"All right — I'll try it," she responded bravely.

"Billy," said the commander, "help this lady up the steps. She's got to get up them — that's all there is to it. Now you take her hands — I'll stay behind and push a bit. There! — that's the way." With a tremendous effort the stout lady reached the top of the steps and slid gracefully through the door.

"There!" repeated Mr. Brinton, wiping his forehead and turning to his other guests with considerable relief. "That was a pretty close call. I'd begun to think we'd have to get a switch engine and a steam crane to hoist her in, or else move the table out of the car and serve the lunch on the platform."

Mrs. Squires, snugly fitted into the largest chair the *Mercury* afforded, rested, panting a little from her extraordinary exertions, investigating the integrity of her wearing apparel. The solicitous and skilful Billy drew near, bearing on a tray a glass of water, which she gratefully accepted, sipping it slowly.

"I don't see how I ever did get up those steps," she remarked. "Al always says he guesses there

mus' be a special providence f'r fat folks 's well as drunken men 'nd fools. Anyhow, it seems to me 's if I get through a lot o' places by luck that I c'd never get through by measurement. I reckon I'm 's much 's a foot wider 'n those stairs. It's awful unhandy sometimes, weighin'—weighin' as much 's I do," she finished, with a noticeable omission of the specific, being either ignorant of her real weight, ashamed of it, or unable to estimate it with presentable nicety. Her loquacity, pouring forth upon the sympathetic black man, was accepted by him with due gravity. Then the commander appeared in the doorway.

"Come on," he said, and he entered, followed by his guests. "You got up those steps famously, Mrs. Squires," he said. "You couldn't have done it better if your mother had been a ballet dancer and your father a steeple-jack."

The humorous attribution of such a parentage to the enormous country Methodist lady seemed a trifle inappropriate, and Mrs. Squires was at first rather inclined to resent the reflection upon her highly respectable maternal ancestry; but perceiving that her host had meant to be nothing but complimentary, she held her peace and entered no protest. By this time the gravity of King, however, was strained almost to the point of annihila-

tion. Mr. Brinton's appearance at the church fair with his three negroes, his subsequent capture of the surprised Miss Hyde, his remarkable tour of the Methodist matrons, the curious chaperon he had finally managed to secure for his luncheon, the thoroughly businesslike manner in which the estimable lady had been thrust up the steps and jammed into the car, followed by the astonishing form of compliment the capitalist had chosen to pay her for her good-humored toleration of what seemed almost an impertinence—all together, King felt that, measured by his deeds during the eighteen hours just passed, this New York nouveau riche millionnaire was the most extraordinary character he had ever met.

"Let's all sit down right away—I'm fearfully hungry," said Mr. Brinton. "Mrs. Squires, you're all right just where you are. Miss Hyde, if you will sit at my left. King, will you please take the place next to Miss Hyde? Billy, bring on the lunch as soon as it's ready."

The chaperon turned her mammoth form toward Burgess and addressed her confidences to his ear.

"Ain't Mr. Brinton jus' the greatest?"

"He certainly is," Burgess replied with deep sincerity.

"So liberal 'n' so good-natured. You jus' can't get mad at him. An' he says the queerest things! The idea of his tellin' me that my mother might h've been a bally dancer! — I declare!"

"Mr. Brinton didn't mean anything by it," the young man hastened to assure her. "It's merely his way of putting things, — very vivid and forceful, don't you think?"

Meanwhile Eleanor was confessing that the present was her initial visit to a private car, when the white-jacketed waiter appeared through the narrow passage, with the clams. By a positively brilliant stroke of tact the genial host had thought to warn the maker of the menu to omit the preliminary cocktail, which customarily held an important place in similar entertainments that he had provided; if this soothing and seductive beverage had been set before Mrs. Squires it is probable that the far from bigoted lady of the enormous bulk, who had submitted without visible anger to Brinton's scarcely flattering speculations upon her parentage, could scarcely have been prevented from rising up and fleeing in ponderous protest from such a horrid debauch. The conversation went forward briskly enough.

"When are you going to move up here for the summer, Mr. Brinton?" King asked.

"Oh, I guess in about a month," the capitalist replied.

Mrs. Squires perceived a chance to insert a wedge in the interest of her denomination.

"I do hope that when you come f'r good, you'll reg'larly attend our church," she said cordially. "You know so many of the leadin' people in it, now."

"Oh, yes — delightful people," her host hastily conceded. "Won't you have another olive?" The prospect of spending each Sunday morning sitting in an uncomfortable pew and listening to the desperately tedious and inexcusably protracted exhortations of a typical country preacher struck him with dismay. "But I'm not a Methodist, you know," he confessed.

The stout lady's disappointment over this disclosure was less than the rest of the party had expected it to be. Very likely, although she considered Mr. Brinton to be most liberal and good-natured, she did not deem him an especially successful demonstration of the possibilities of any branch of the Christian religion — very likely she thought him, by the very fact of his being outside her fold, a possible convert. As for Mr. Brinton himself, his Sunday mornings were spent in diverse ways — in reading the papers, in playing at bill-

iards or bridge, in automobiling, in bed, or in almost anything except attending religious services.

"Is there a Lutheran church here?" he asked Mrs. Squires, with simulated anxiety.

"No, there isn't," replied that lady, in some little surprise.

"Well, I'm a Lutheran," her host announced firmly.

Mrs. Squires was somewhat taken aback at this statement. Evidently Mr. Brinton had advanced it as a sufficient reason why he should not attend her church, and yet she was at a loss to follow his line of argument. She innocently and not unnaturally deemed the lack of a church of one's own particular faith a fairly sufficient cause for selecting another friendly sect with which temporarily to worship. But her host's seemingly irrelevant statement had been delivered with the authority of finality. Being totally ignorant of the cardinal principles of Lutheranism, she wondered vaguely whether the rules of that denomination forbade its members to associate in service with all outsiders; perhaps there was some feud between the two sects, of which she had never heard. She relapsed into the silence of defeat.

"Yes, I'm a Lutheran," the capitalist repeated; "Martin Luther's old religion's good enough for

me; wine, woman, and song — that's what I believe in; gewein, gewoman, unt gesong, as our German friends quaintly put it. I believe in associating myself with one of the less powerful religions — sects, I should say, anyway, Mrs. Squires — they exercise a restraining influence over the larger ones — keep them from getting too cocky, so to speak. Competition's a good thing in religion as well as in everything else. I dare say you Methodists turn out a good deal better class of Methodism than you would if you were left alone and didn't have a lot of healthy competitors continually trying to get your trade away."

At the end of this extraordinary harangue Mrs. Squires was quite speechless. King was in the meantime talking to Miss Hyde.

"Why didn't you tell us that you knew Miss Brinton so well — when we met you yesterday?" he asked in a low voice, his eyes twinkling a little.

The girl laid down her fork and looked at him seriously.

"Honestly, Mr. King, I scarcely knew her at all," she said. "I've been trying my hardest to tell all of you so right along, but none of you seems to pay the slightest attention to what I say — especially Mr. Brinton. Why in the world do you

suppose that he keeps on insisting I was his daughter's most intimate friend?"

The young man looked at Eleanor's brown eyes and felt tempted to suggest that any method of forcing a way into her friendship was easily to be excused from any man, — opulent widowers certainly being no exception, — but he quelled this projected indiscretion with an effort.

"Oh, he doesn't mean any harm by it," he said. "He's a most peculiar man — it isn't very difficult to see that. But don't worry — Burgess and I understand perfectly. Regard it as a joke."

"Yes. You and Mr. Burgess may understand, but every one doesn't," the girl protested. "He's really putting me in a false position. Miss Brinton, for one, won't understand, and when she gets here and meets the Burnham people, she'll think I've been trying to pose as her room-mate."

"Oh, no," King reassured her. But on second thought it struck him that under the circumstances the New York girl might easily be justified in some such suspicion. He reflected a moment. "I hadn't thought of that — very likely you're right," he said. "Now, there's no use of trying to do anything with Mr. Brinton, and I don't know Miss Brinton myself, but if you like, I'll ask Burgess to explain the whole

thing to her. We were really responsible for getting you into it."

Eleanor considered his offer rather carefully, Mr. Brinton being conversationally immersed in a dissertation on block-signal systems.

"It would be very good of you — if you don't mind," she said.

The meal passed off splendidly. Mr. Brinton fairly shone. His fund of information on subjects seldom discussed was simply astonishing. From block signals he turned the conversation toward patent methods of starting horse-races. Thence it drifted to the history of the evolution of Monte Carlo. From there, Mr. Brinton having been reminded of a certain Russian nobleman who had lost vast sums in demonstrating the pathetic fallibility of a roulette system, it skipped to St. Petersburg, and thence to a technical but easily grasped comparison of Slavonic and American methods in the refining of petroleum. This led to the description of a burning tank ship, which Mr. Brinton once had seen while he was crossing the Atlantic; and this was followed by a short account of recently invented fire-fighting apparatus and scientific methods of blowing up buildings against the advance of a conflagration. The question of water-supply and pressure came next, — Mr. Brinton knew a man

who had just patented an exceedingly ingenious gate-valve, which he treated in detail, — and then an intricate comparison between the sewage systems of modern Chicago and ancient Rome was given by the man at the head of the table. Mr. Brinton did almost all the talking, — he seemed to confine the talk to subjects upon which no one of his guests possessed the slightest iota of information, — and by the conclusion of the luncheon he had attacked and satisfactorily reviewed a most extraordinary collection of topics, ranging from seedless apples to Polynesian folk-songs. Even King and Burgess, who were young men of considerable courage, erudition, and tact, were quite unable to find an opening through which their host's continuous monologue might be broadened into a general conversation. And, at any rate, they were resigned to a feeling that although they themselves were making but a sorry showing, it was impossible not to be interested in what the commander was saying. Mrs. Squires hung on his every word, and if she remembered what he said, she gained in the course of that meal more genuine information upon such curious subjects as volcanic activities in interior Iceland and the care and breeding of cockatoos, than in the whole of her previous life.

After luncheon the three gentlemen smoked their cigars on the observation platform, and at three o'clock a boy appeared with a buckboard.

"Burgess," said the commander, "I'm going to ask you and King to see the ladies home safe; the division superintendent is going to put the car on this down train — I find I shall have to go to Detroit to-morrow." He shook hands heartily with all his guests. "Mrs. Squires, it was very kind of you to come; Miss Hyde, we shall hope to see a great deal of you when May arrives; glad to have met you, King — look me up in town; good-by, Burgess; be good." The ever ready colored men managed to pry the stout chaperon out of the car and down the steps, and the four visitors set out in the buckboard, the magnate waving them farewell with a large napkin from the observation platform of the *Mercury*.

"Isn't he the very devil of a man!" said King, in frank admiration, as they went slowly up the hill.

There was no dissenting opinion, even from the Methodist lady.

V

KING kept his promise, and promptly spoke Burgess of what he had suggested to Elea while at Mr. Brinton's luncheon, and one even about a week later Burgess took occasion to ca out the plan she had approved. Half after ei found him at the door of the big house on Fi Avenue, where the Brintons made their New Yo home.

Every acquaintance of Mr. Brinton's was stru with a sudden similar surprise upon entering for t first time the residence of that opulent individu Although the man's personal pretentiousness w slight, his flamboyant characteristics were so deci edly developed that one not unnaturally expect the dwelling to reflect with general accuracy the to of its owner. One instantly looked for such thin as these: a great many lights, and a great mar pictures, more startling than commendable, crowde together on the walls, and overelaborate furnitur upon which the dollar sign — the mark of th beast — was quite ineradicable, and expensiv

hangings hung in superfluous places with fearful effect, and wonderful cherubs, executed by some famous mural painter very likely on the ceiling of the billiard room, and solid silver coal-scuttles, and a man dressed in red plush to open the door. Nothing of the sort was to be seen. It was impossible to say exactly what Mr. Brinton would have liked; fortunately he had not insisted on dictating suggestions to the highly efficient gentlemen who had been responsible for the completed dwelling. And the informal geniality of the master was not permitted to extend to his servants; Burgess was admitted to the house by a grave and discreet-looking person in irreproachable livery, who took his card and ushered him into a rather dimly lighted drawing-room.

The young man looked about him somewhat curiously. It was the first time he had ever been in the house, although he had come to know Miss Brinton quite well from meeting her at various parties and functions. He was quick to miss the stinging evidences of elaborate bad taste, which he (and every other newcomer) instantly assumed existed within the mansion of the capitalist. On first rally from his surprise it struck him that he was in a really beautiful room. It was very long, so long that the light that came from in front of

where Burgess was sitting seemed to melt ar almost to fade away before it reached the du heavy portières in the rear. Over the polishe floor were laid several — and not too many — dar antique rugs. Most of the furniture was of o mahogany, and the pieces were somewhat form and undeniably elegant. Two or three small tabl stood easily placed. On one side of the roon toward the rear, there was an onyx fireplace wit curious, twisted-brass andirons, and on the mante piece above it stood an onyx clock. Burgess wa agreeably surprised in the paintings which th room contained; there were not many of then but even in the dim light he recognized the plun ing horses and burning sands and hot, whit atmosphere of a Diaz, and a flat canal and slowl turning windmill and yellow-sailed fishing boats c a Mesdag, and a fine winter forest scene with dar pine trees and glistening snow. Everything in th room was quiet and richly handsome, and Burges found himself wondering.

Miss Brinton shortly came down, and the youn man rose.

"Why, how do you do?" said the girl, holdin out her hand. "I'm awfully glad to see you How very dark it is here! Would you mind ring ing that bell? Thank you. I was getting horribl

tired of myself, and I just hoped some one would come in. Papa went down South yesterday to buy a street-car line somewhere, and I'm all alone. How does it happen you're not at Ardsley? — I thought the Warren Whitings were taking every one up there for dinner."

Burgess laughed as he seated himself, letting her run on. He was amused to note how quickly she had picked up the conversational débutante manner.

"One reason why I'm not at Ardsley is a cruel physical inability to be in more than one place at a time; another is because the Warren Whitings never took me up — even to Ardsley; I haven't the pleasure of knowing them," he replied.

"Thomas, please turn on a few more lights," said the girl to the servant who responded to Burgess's ring. Then she renewed her attention to her guest; Miss Brinton possessed somewhat abnormal suspicions, — her father's shrewdness had come down to her in this form, — and she leaped upon the young man's disavowal of acquaintance with the family in question as somewhat more sinister than one could have assumed.

"Why don't you know them — aren't they nice?" she inquired. "They go around a lot with your set."

"I presume they're very nice indeed," Burgess answered; "but dear me, I haven't any fixed and proper set — even of shirtstuds. I merely don't happen ever to have met them — the Whitings, not the shirtstuds. That's all."

"Oh!" said the girl. She was evidently a little disappointed and not entirely satisfied with this explanation. "I don't know them myself, either, but isn't Mrs. Whiting a sister of that Murray Sanderson who married the same chorus girl twice?" she asked.

The spectacular course of this exuberant young person's bound out of still life into marital felicities, thence into marital infelicities, once more into still life, and then into marital felicities again without once changing the opposite member of the personal equation, was too well known either to repress or to require comment.

"Yes, I believe so," said Burgess, shortly.

"What's Murray Sanderson doing now?" inquired his hostess, unwilling to sacrifice upon the altar of propriety such a lively topic.

"I believe he's in the real estate business," the visitor replied.

"Oh, I meant, what is he doing with his wife?" Miss Brinton corrected.

"Supporting her, I hope," Burgess answered

somewhat curtly. It was easy to see that he did not approve of Mrs. Warren Whiting's brother.

Miss Brinton laughed with easy good nature.

"Now I know how to get you angry," she said. "It's to keep right on talking about some one you don't like. I wonder why you don't like Murray Sanderson. Surely not merely because he made a couple of foolish marriages. And they say that Mrs. Murray Sanderson is very pretty in a cheap sort of way. Did you ever know her?" she inquired with a sudden suspicion highly creditable to her liberality of thought.

Burgess was irritated. His hostess had actually hit upon one of his weaknesses; he disliked to discuss those whom he disliked.

"Mrs. Sanderson, the ex-chorus girl?" he said coldly. "No, I never knew her."

The débutante's good humor was unimpaired.

"Well, don't be so horribly peevish about it," she responded with some amusement. "Of course it's odd you never met her, — at some time or other, — but of course you can't know every one. But from your indignation, one would think that I had suggested that you'd never known any other chorus girl in your whole life. No one man can be expected to know all of them."

This remarkable twist in the interpretation of

his words, Burgess was forced to admit showed a certain superficial cleverness on the part of his young hostess. He had scarcely expected that his almost abrupt denial of the acquaintance of one particular chorus girl would be construed as a reluctant admission that he was not on terms of personal friendship with every desirable member of the entire profession Mrs. Sanderson had followed before her marriage. Moreover, he was bound to confess that in his own case there were certain exceptions.

"No. It would be almost as difficult to know all chorus girls as to keep from knowing a single one of them," he replied evenly.

Miss Brinton was pleased at this epigrammatic reply, which certainly indicated a regaining of poise.

"That sounds much more like you," she said with satisfaction, reaching out toward the table which stood beside her. "Will you have a chocolate, or is it too soon after dinner for you?"

"None for me, thank you," Burgess replied.

"I think I will, anyway," said his hostess. "I'm awfully fond of them, and the last year I was at Allingwood they wouldn't let us have any in our rooms."

"That was pretty hard, wasn't it?" said the

young man. "What did you do — secrete boxes of caramels in hollow trees near the school? And by the way, speaking of Allingwood, I met one of your Allingwood friends the other day."

"Who was it?" asked the girl with interest. "Wait a minute — tell me where you've been, and I'll guess."

"I've been up in Connecticut — at Burnham," her guest answered.

Miss Brinton looked at him, laid down the chocolate cream she had taken up, and, with no evidence of approval, she said, "You've seen Eleanor Hyde."

Burgess was actually startled; he did not know what line his next remark should take. He had expected to bring up the subject less abruptly, prepared for a lack of interest on the part of his hostess. He had presumed that Miss Hyde's name would evoke but faint memories or the casual attention fitted to a chance acquaintance of a bygone day, and he had set his plans to stir Miss Brinton's attention out of diffidence so far as he might be able. But from the incisive manner in which she had met his approach, he felt rather as if he were put on the defensive and called upon to explain the fact of his having been in Burnham at all. He decided to move slowly.

"Yes. It was Miss Hyde."

To judge from her odd hesitancy, it was evident to Burgess that his hostess would have preferred to continue along the laid-aside subject of the man who had married the same chorus girl twice; but as he had come with a single certain purpose, he declined to be jostled abruptly off the central topic.

"I saw your father in Burnham," he said.

The slight annoyance of the girl came forth stripped of reticence.

"Yes. We've taken a place there for the summer. He didn't mention having seen you. But he said that he'd met Eleanor Hyde," she remarked.

"Yes?" said Burgess, politely.

"I scarcely knew her at all," Miss Brinton continued. "We were in school only a few months at the same time."

"Exactly what Miss Hyde said," her guest responded affably; "but I really couldn't tell how well you'd known each other, because Mr. Brinton kept insisting that you were intimate friends, and finally got to the point of telling people you had roomed together."

"Papa told people that we had roomed together?" the girl repeated in surprise. "Don't

you think he may have misunderstood Miss Hyde?"

"Oh, no. There was no misunderstanding. Miss Hyde kept saying that you hadn't at all, but your father insisted on it. And when your father insists on anything — well, he's apt to be extremely insistent," the young man said, with a laugh.

"Yes, I know," Miss Brinton returned absently. Her mind was attempting to fathom the motives of the two actors in this misunderstanding. From which side had the impelling power come? Was the country girl laying plans to capture the opulent widower, or had he been caught by her unthrust charm? Other trials had been made with the purpose of annexing Mr. Brinton and his fortune; the energetic widower had more than once betrayed toward some desirable young woman an interest which seemed to outrank the platonic. In all these affairs May had put her foot down as firmly as she dared; she resented the possibility of her father's marrying again. From Mr. Brinton's point of view almost anything was possible; but fortunately for the continuity of May's peace of mind his affections were too nomadic to be easily brought under a single permanent control.

"I wonder why," said Miss Brinton, after considerable thought.

Burgess saw her trend of reasoning.

"So did Miss Hyde," he said. "She hadn't the slightest idea what he was driving at, and it put her in a rather embarrassing position, too."

"How so?" May asked.

"Why, your father gave all the Burnham people the impression that you and she were simply inseparable, and when you go up there for the summer and fail to greet her as a bosom companion, those people will every one of them think that she posed to your father as being more your friend than she really was, or else they'll think you've cut her since you left school."

Miss Brinton reflected on this.

"That's so, isn't it?" she said, regarding Burgess with some perplexity. "What an awkward position to put me in! how do you suppose we can find a way out of it? I certainly don't want to hurt her feelings; she seemed very nice — she's really awfully pretty — but I hardly know her, you see."

Here the diplomacy of her guest showed above the surface. He had determined that Eleanor Hyde should take whatever advantage she could gain from an association with the Brintons, and he felt that he was responsible for what had gone forward thus far, and that he must not allow what

he had done to react upon her. King had warned him in the very beginning that he was running a considerable risk even in the event of the ultimate success of his designs, and he now saw that he had gone too far to permit a turning back, and he must follow through to a finish.

"Of course you're not in the slightest degree responsible yourself," he said.

"Papa does such strange things; I don't understand them," Miss Brinton agreed.

"But I don't see what you can do now, except —"

The girl was interested, for which Burgess was glad.

"Well?" she asked expectantly.

"Except," said her visitor, reflectively, "to certify to your father's false estimate of your relations with Miss Hyde, — that is to say, treat her as an intimate friend."

This plan seemed to Miss Brinton to be decidedly ingenious, but she was by no means certain that she approved of it. She held a generally favorable remembrance of Eleanor; but if the pretty schoolgirl had developed into a worldly schemer of subtle sagacity, the acceptance of the course which Burgess had proposed meant the evacuation of a very important defence. Miss

Brinton was extremely reluctant to be a link in any chain between her father and any attractive maiden; if this girl really had designs upon the capitalist, May, who was not at all a hypocrite, was by no means anxious to open her arms to the youthful plotter; while if the initiative came from the other side, and the innocence of Miss Hyde was clear beyond doubt, May was very unready to assist her father, who was quite irresponsible when he ventured in these directions and pursuits. She saw vivid danger in the prettiness and charm which she remembered that Eleanor had, when at school, bidden fair to develop. And yet, against all this, Miss Brinton was at heart good-natured and kind and even generous, and she realized that on the surface of the situation, especially from the viewpoint of Burgess, the country girl could well feel that justice lay upon her side.

"You mean that I should take her up as an intimate friend as soon as I get to Burnham?" she inquired.

"Exactly," said Burgess.

"But an intimate friend — there's got to be something spontaneous about that. One can't keep up a pose forever, if it's hypocritical. Suppose — even if I should like her — she shouldn't like me?" May argued to her caller.

"She's running very little risk," returned the young man politely, with a smile.

"Yes — but suppose she stood off and was disagreeably independent and refused to be taken up?"

"I don't think there's much danger of that," the visitor answered. "In the first place, it must be so stupid for her on that farm that she'd be glad of any chance to get off it and be among some civilized people; Allingwood is a poor preparing school for a dairymaid; and in the second place, they say that you can be very tactful and nice, when you please."

"Merci, monsieur," said the girl, with a little laugh. But her good humor had returned. Why she should so easily have been convinced, she did not know; but somehow in her mind she set apart Eleanor Hyde from the class of girls who regarded Mr. Brinton merely as a difficult but tremendously desirable matrimonial catch; somehow she felt from her slender knowledge of her schoolmate that Eleanor was a girl of complete sincerity, and that in her sincerity was May's safety.

"It would be as though I were getting an intimate friend ready-made, wouldn't it?" she said.

Burgess laughed.

"You've hit it precisely," he replied. "No

long, troublesome interregnum with all the annoying detail of slowly ripening acquaintance; you pick the full-blown blossom right from the stalk, so to speak."

"It might be even rather amusing," Miss Brinton said reflectively. "Do you think I'd like her?" she asked curiously. "I hardly know her now, you see."

"Yes, I think you'd like her," the visitor replied, affecting mature deliberation. "Hamilton King and I both liked her a lot—quite a good deal," he argued. He was much too wise to include Mr. Brinton in the number of Eleanor's admirers.

Perhaps May would have herself rectified this tactful omission had not her attention been caught by the name of Burgess's fellow-approver.

"Hamilton King?" she echoed. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh, yes; I'm around with him more or less," the young man replied.

"I'm just crazy about his books," Miss Brinton confided. "Did you like *The River Road* or *Gray Stars* best? Don't you think the man in *Gray Stars* was fine?"

"The one who said that love was the temporary victory of emotion over reason, and that hypocrisy was to wear your heart on your sleeve and then

wear your sleeve inside out? He seemed like a little less of a prig and a prude than most of the heroes in the novels that are turned off nowadays," her caller admitted. "Perhaps it was because he did less — he was less offensively active than most heroes."

"I don't think you're very enthusiastic," the girl remarked with an air of reproof, "especially when you're such a friend of Mr. King's."

"Oh, I dare say I'm not noisily loyal," Burgess conceded. "But the doctrine that the king can do no wrong would have been fearfully difficult to establish if his Majesty had gone into the production of up-to-date fiction. I suppose Ham King's above the average, and there must be something good in his stories or so many people wouldn't buy them; but you see I've known the man so long that I can't get up any impersonal interest in him as a mere author, and whenever one of his books makes a hit, I feel a sort of surprise."

"I don't think that at all nice of you," said his hostess.

"It's only natural," Burgess returned. "I'm fond of Ham — very fond of him, indeed, but I know him from A to Z, and I like him for what he is. You probably think of him as a sort of composite of all the attractive qualities of the men

he draws in his books. He isn't a bit like any one of them. He's really a first-rate chap, but you'd probably be horribly disappointed in him."

"I don't believe it," said the girl. "And I think it's very unkind — yes, positively cruel in you to knock down a simple schoolgirl's idol in this unceremonious way. I'm sure I should like him if I knew him."

"Oh, I dare say you would," her guest conceded. "But you'd probably like him a great deal better if you'd never read his books, and you'd probably never like his books half so well again. Still, if you'd care at any time to risk the experiment — " he proposed.

"How?" his hostess asked.

"Why, I might bring him here to call some evening. He knows your father; they met at Burnham, you know."

"How did you and Mr. King happen to be there at this time of the year?" Miss Brinton inquired.

"Oh, King was just burrowing around and trying to smear himself with local color, and I was keeping him company," the young man explained. "Ham's writing a book now, in which the color and action simply reek of New England. It's called *Harmony Dale;* I don't think much of the title; it's the name of the girl in the story, and I

must say it sounds to me more like the name of a flag-station on a one-track railroad; but somehow King seems to fancy it."

"*Harmony Dale?* I think it's quite pretty. I don't believe you're at all a good critic, anyway," his hostess answered.

"Now I thought *The Fourth Favorite* was a good title," Burgess stated.

"Yes," the girl agreed. She was struck by a new idea. "But meeting papa there must have confused and upset Mr. King's local color sense fearfully. There's nothing of the rigorous Puritan about papa. Barring ingenuity he doesn't suggest the plodding, frugal Yankee a bit. There's no griddle-cakes and oxen atmosphere about papa — champagne and forty-horse-power touring-cars for him every time. I should have thought Mr. King would have been rather put out and annoyed."

"Oh, he wasn't at all," Burgess hastened to assure her. "He enjoyed your father very much; Mr. Brinton was very kind — he had us all to lunch on his car."

"Us all?" the girl echoed.

"King, and a fat lady named Squires, who chaperoned the party, and Miss Hyde, and me."

"Really?" inquired Miss Brinton, with interest.

"He said nothing of it to me. He mentioned having attended some church fair, and I assumed he met Eleanor Hyde — and the rest — there."

"Oh, your father had a splendid time at the fair," Burgess replied quickly. "He bought, I should imagine, almost everything the management were unable to dispose of to any one else, and when you go to Burnham, you'll be the most popular girl in town, if you take half the advantage of the reputation your father's made."

Miss Brinton was not entirely satisfied.

"Well, where *did* papa meet Eleanor Hyde?" she persisted.

Her caller determined on complete frankness.

"Why, King and I had an accident with a buggy the day before, and we stopped in at her uncle's farm to make repairs, and discovered that she had been at school with you. I happened to mention it to your father, and when we were all of us out driving the next morning, we called. Then your father decided to have us in to lunch on his car, and we took Miss Hyde with us, getting Mrs. Squires on the way."

"I see," his hostess replied. This seemed to establish satisfactorily the motives of the country girl; at any rate the initial impetus had not come from her. Mr. Brinton's own motives were alway

"DETERMINED ON COMPLETE FRANKNESS."

perfectly inscrutable and frequently a maze even to his daughter, who was overweary from attempting constantly to penetrate them, her efforts being usually quite void of success. She concluded not to try to analyze his conduct on this occasion, and accepted the situation from Burgess's point of view. But a measure of the paternal shrewdness had descended to her, and she by no means lost sight of her visitor's manœuvre.

"How neatly you lay your plans!" she said to him, smiling with a fine depth of worldly wisdom.

Burgess was a little taken aback.

"Plans?—what plans?" he inquired in some embarrassment.

"Why, just this," the girl answered. "Perhaps you think I'm so dreadfully dull I can't see through your little game. You and Mr. King are wandering about the country, and in some out-of-the-way spot you run across a remarkably attractive girl. As social formalities and conventions forbid your taking her yourselves off this desert island, you cast about to find some one who properly can. Here is where I break into the libretto; I seem to be the most likely rescuer, and you start things so that papa gets involved in the game—and he isn't a very hard subject when there's a really pretty girl. Then you come down here and inno-

cently suggest to me that since papa is responsible for getting the girl into this false position, it would be pleasant and a nice thing for me to go ahead and get her out of it. That means taking her off her desert island and starting her with my own set, where you think she will be able to take care of herself, if only she gets the chance." The girl's eyes were bright with satisfaction. "Oh, you're a very clever schemer, Mr. Oliver Burgess!" she said triumphantly.

This synopsis of the plans of Burgess was so nearly exact in its truth that it was impossible to deny its general accuracy. To be sure, he had not exerted any effort to effect the position in which Mr. Brinton had so profoundly enmeshed himself; but, after all, that was something unplanned, which had worked out to the advantage of the conspirators. He could only laugh at the ease with which the girl had solved his elaborately laid purposes.

"Oh, you're a very clever guesser, Miss May Brinton," he answered in full surrender of his secret.

"Then I'm right?" His hostess insisted upon pinning him to a confession.

"I'll have to admit most of it," Burgess replied, laughing. "But will you help us?" he asked.

The girl was doubly pleased — with her own alertness and acuteness in so quickly analyzing the motives and movements of the man, and in the subtle flattery of his appeal to her social power.

"And take the pretty Eleanor to be the friend of my heart — to please you and Hamilton King? Well, I suppose I shall have to," she responded.

Burgess did not intend to offer this whimsical young lady an opportunity to change her mind. He rose to go.

"You didn't say whether you wished to meet King," he suggested.

"Perhaps I'll never like his books as well again, and perhaps I'll be horribly disappointed in him — but you may bring him here some evening," said Miss Brinton, smiling.

Burgess left the Brinton mansion, well pleased over his success in having so promptly gained the magnate's daughter as an ally in his enterprise of bringing Eleanor Hyde into a broader social world. It was certainly true that he had won with ready facility out of a difficult position. May Brinton was a young lady whose prejudices were not at all easy to overcome, and as she was always hotly suspicious both of her father and of any attractive

girl upon whom he chose to cast any portion of his energetic interest, Burgess felt with excusable pride that in this case he had accomplished his desires despite a severe handicap. In fact Miss Brinton had acted with considerable good nature and even with generosity; she had undertaken to play a part for which she had but little choice or taste; she had agreed to offer her intimacy to a casual schoolmate, and she was accepting a foreign obligation quite against her inclinations. Burgess had not been able to advance a single really cogent or conclusive reason why she should expend her energies and lend her hand in extricating Miss Hyde from an embarrassment into which Mr. Brinton had thoughtlessly thrust her. And yet the capitalist's daughter had agreed to do what Burgess desired, and he felt warmly gratified. He determined to stop at King's rooms, and tell the novelist of his success.

King lived in a bachelor apartment house just west of Fifth Avenue, and Burgess started down the great perpendicular social artery of the town, for Mr. Brinton had built his dwelling on the first northward advance of fashion, and it stood almost a mile up the side of Central Park.

It was a clear night, full of stars. The white electric lights along the avenue brought out sharply

the small green leaves and budding branches of the park trees over beyond the low wall. There was little traffic up and down the way; a hansom occasionally went by Burgess with its bobbing yellow lamps and the beat of the horse's hoofs striking sharply on the pavement, or an automobile with a searching headlight would cough harshly past and swiftly disappear in the distance, or a belated business wagon would go hurrying along. There were few pedestrians — a couple of policemen starting out on patrol, some single wayfarers, each stepping forward briskly as if to a definite terminus, a messenger carrying a big pasteboard box, two or three couples of young men and maidens, whose pace made for leisure and whose thoughts for romance. The cross streets were clean with evening silence, except where groups of children were out playing in front of the brightly lighted houses; these cross streets all ran between high borders of brick and stone dwellings straight on down to the river. They were lined by long rows of yellow gas-lamps that seemed to meet mistily out at the farther eastern end. There was scarcely enough vernal evening breeze to swirl the dust underfoot; the lightest branches of the trees in the park barely swayed against the white lights.

Burgess went on and crossed the Plaza and passed by the towering hotels and went over to the other side of the avenue, and a few blocks south of this he turned into a side street and came to the building in which King dwelt. The elevator took him up to the fourth floor, and he got out of the car and pressed the button beside the door of the novelist's apartment. Griffiths, the dignified and clean-shaven servant, answered the ring.

"Good evening, Mr. Burgess," he said, holding the door open for the visitor to enter.

"Where's Mr. King?" Burgess asked.

"Out of town, sir," the man answered.

"Indeed?" the young man remarked in some surprise. "When will he be back?"

"He didn't say, sir; he went away this afternoon."

Burgess would have departed, — he turned to leave, — but he thought of one other question, carelessly posed but suddenly indicative to the young man's quick mind of something he had barely suspected.

"Did Mr. King say where he was going?" he casually inquired.

"No, sir, — but he said to forward his mail to Burnham Inn, Burnham, Connecticut. I presume

he's gone there," the servant responded with characteristic exactness.

"Ah!" said the visitor. He smiled rather cynically and picked out a pattern in the rug with the point of his cane, reflecting. "Very well. Good night."

"Good night, sir," said the man, closing the door behind him.

VI

HAMILTON KING was not an utterly selfish young man, but he was one whose movements were usually prompted by mere desire, and his desires were often sudden and sometimes inexplicable. The fact that he was to be seen quietly dining at the Holland House of an evening was no certainty that next morning he might not quite unexpectedly start for the Timbuctoo Timber Reserve; the four rather successful novels which he had written furnished him with ample means to gratify any nomadic tendencies that rose to the surface of his wishes; he came and went exactly as he pleased — frequently and in strange directions. But in all the magnets that pulled on King, the sex element had heretofore been lacking. He had never been in love, and the girls he pictured within the pages of his stories were unreal though convincing composites of attractive qualities, sums of integral items of charm, modelled from the abstract. King had himself been always careless of applause, somewhat sceptical of sincerity in love

affairs, and overcritical toward women he had taken the interest to estimate. From the feminine point of view he was difficult through his sheer indifference. And his reappearance in Burnham was the cause of some little surprise to the man himself; he could not have clearly said what had led him to return.

A girl who chanced one morning to be walking along the hilly country road that leads from Burnham to Perkins Mills was somewhat startled to be overtaken by a young man who took off his soft hat as he came up beside her, and said, "How do you do, Miss Hyde?"

She turned swiftly.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. King?" she answered. "You almost frightened me when you spoke, although we're rather defective in desperate characters around here. How did you recognize me?"

"Oh, I saw you coming out of that red gateway as I was going up the hill," the young man replied. "I'm very glad to see you again. And I admit that your country seems entirely peaceful just at present, but just you wait till our friend Mr. Brinton and some of his associates begin to arrive, and then you won't lack for desperate characters," he said, smiling.

Eleanor laughed, and King felt with a queer, quick thrill that the flash of sunshine in her brown eyes was worth coming very far to see.

"Don't you think you're a little severe?" she responded. "Now I should call Mr. Brinton impulsive, perhaps, but scarcely desperate."

"Ah, but you didn't see the things he bought at that fair," the novelist rejoined. "There was an oil painting of some stranded cows, the purchase of which mere impulse could never excuse or explain."

"He's certainly very generous and hospitable," the girl answered. "The way he took me and carried me off into town was perfectly astonishing. I don't know how I succumbed. I suppose really I shouldn't have gone, but I had *some* excuse; I *did* know his daughter slightly, and I *did* want to see a private car," she confessed, smiling.

"Mr. Brinton is certainly in one sense a host militant — he's an aggressive entertainer," replied King. "Oh, I think it was perfectly proper for you to go," he reassured her. "You were surely well chaperoned — Mrs. Squires's presence always carries a good deal of weight, you know."

Eleanor flashed another smile at her companion.

"So it does," she said. "By the way, I received

a note from May Brinton this morning," she remarked after a slight pause.

"Did you?" asked the novelist, with interest.

"Yes. She said she had just learned that I lived here, and that she should be very glad to see me again — she had been afraid she wouldn't know any one up this way — something of that sort."

"That was rather nice of her, wasn't it?" King commented.

"Especially if she had been told that I was posing as her room-mate at Allingwood," Miss Hyde said. "Do you suppose — well, do you think that Mr. Brinton told her to write to me? You see he seemed determined not only that we should be friends here, but that we should have been intimate friends at school."

"No, I don't believe he suggested that she write you, because if he had, I think Miss Brinton would have promptly rejected the suggestion — from what I hear of her," replied the novelist.

"Then why did she write?" inquired the girl, somewhat perplexed.

King met this question neatly.

"Well, you know Burgess said he'd go and explain to her about her father's forcing this false intimacy on you; and very likely May Brinton,

who was doubtless perfectly truthful when she said she didn't know any one here, was really pleased that her father's thoughtlessness had made it possible for her to take up her acquaintance with you on a somewhat closer basis than at Allingwood."

Eleanor was dubious of this pleasant theory.

"It was very kind of Mr. Burgess, but it's more likely that May Brinton would have been angry because she was drawn into the affair at all — it's more likely she would leave her father to make his own way out of his difficulties — if he thought of them," she said.

"Yes. But she's written you this letter," said the young man.

"That's true," Miss Hyde conceded. "It was very kind in Mr. Burgess to go to her and explain that I wasn't telling stories about her," she repeated; "but I don't want her to feel as if she had to do anything for me; for I don't care very much what people think or say about me — if it isn't true," she stated, a little proudly.

King liked the girl's pretty spirit of independence. He found himself regretting that he could not see her eyes when she was making her statement, and caught up his own regret with a little surprise.

"Oh, it will come out all right," he replied easily. "There's no compulsion on either side. But if you should like each other you can make this an excuse for becoming friends more rapidly."

"Do you really think so?" Eleanor asked, a little anxiously.

"Certainly I do," the novelist asserted. They had come by this time to the entrance of the Hyde place, and he paused. The girl noticed it and turned toward him.

"You're coming in, aren't you?" she asked.

It was a perfectly natural invitation, given in an entirely casual way, and yet King discovered that for some reason he felt irrationally pleased. He found himself reflecting that it would be wonderfully pleasant to sit down and talk with this girl where he could actually see her instead of merely catching an occasional hasty glimpse of her clear profile as he walked beside her.

"Thank you — you're very good," he said, and they went on together over the little wooden bridge.

In the orchard the cherry trees, which had a fortnight before been a mass of snowy blossoms, were turning quite verdant, and most of the white petals from the apple trees were strewing the ground. Along the orchard wall the green grass

was springing up. The sky overhead was very blue, and the breeze was fresh but soft.

"Did Mr. Burgess come back to Burnham with you?" Eleanor asked.

"No," the novelist responded. "I didn't tell him I was coming. I came on the impulse of the moment," he explained.

"Sometimes I think that most people who come here must come in that way," said the girl. "If they reflected carefully, they would go somewhere else, or stay at home."

Somehow Miss Hyde's dissatisfaction with her town secretly gratified King, for all he did not ask himself the reason of his gratification.

"You don't like Burnham, then?" he said.

"No — not very much; I'm afraid I'm awfully tired of it. But you mustn't tell any one — I wouldn't dare confess this to any one but a stranger," the girl answered with a smile.

"All right. I swear to keep your fearful secret," her companion said gravely. "But do you know, I like the place."

"Oh, I can understand *your* liking it — or any one else's liking it," rejoined Miss Hyde. "The trouble with me is that I've never been able to go far enough away to look at it from the proper distance. You'd find it difficult, I think, to appreci-

ate even a good painting if you happened to be an inconspicuous figure in the background, unable to step out from the frame and select a perspective."

"But you must have a true perspective upon something else, then," King argued.

"I have no chance to find it," Eleanor complained. "The foreground here, considered from behind, is so blurred that I can't see beyond it."

The man smiled.

"There's evidently only one thing for you to do," he said. "Some day you'll just have to take matters in your own hands and break through the back of the canvas and escape."

The girl laughed, but she made no answer.

They went together up the steps of the piazza, beside which the honeysuckle and lilac bushes were commencing to bud, and in at the front door of the old white house. Eleanor led the way through into the sitting room, from which the door stood open to the kitchen. To her surprise she heard through the opening a man's voice, coarse, loud, compelling. She stopped and stood still, listening. The tones of a young woman's voice came back in answer.

"No; you can't have any."

"I tell yer I'm goin' to. Understand?"

King went swiftly past Eleanor and through the doorway. In the middle of the kitchen a young woman was standing, flushed but fearless, facing a rough, stocky man who stood in the entrance to the room. The man was clearly a tramp; his clothes and shoes were ragged and dirty, an unkempt stubble of red beard covered his face, he wore a battered brown derby hat and his left eye was badly bloodshot, which gave to his general appearance a peculiarly sinister touch. At the sight of another man, he drew back a little, one foot on the stone doorstep.

King disregarded for the moment the presence of the young woman. He took in the situation at a glance, and he went straight across the room and spoke to the tramp.

"Well, what do you want here?" he said sharply.

At this unexpected interruption the intruder had been somewhat taken aback, but when he saw that his adversary was a city man and not as large as he, measuring him wickedly with his eye, he saw no peril in prospect, and rallied.

"I want somethin' to eat," he said gruffly.

"Well, you can't have anything," said the young man.

The tramp did not move but stood still, eying

King disdainfully, determinedly, doggedly. Eleanor had come into the room.

"I tell yer I want somethin' to eat," said the intruder, with sullen stubbornness. He raised his gruff voice; he had decided that no very vigorous opposition was likely to present itself. "Come on, now — I want somethin' to eat, and I'm goin' to have somethin'," he said more belligerently, and he started to enter the room.

But King was too quick for him. He took three steps toward the door, and his fist shot out from his shoulder as from a steel spring and centred itself in the tramp's face. Before the heavy, clumsy man realized the attack and gathered himself for it, he had reeled backward, his foot caught against the doorstep, and he fell heavily in a heap on the gravel path, his battered hat rolling out away from him. King stood in the doorway, alertly facing his antagonist.

The tramp, stunned a little, picked himself up slowly. First he looked stupidly at his hands, which the gravel had cut when he fell; then his eyes flamed wickedly.

"Damn you!" he ripped out at the young man, and suddenly he caught up a ragged stone from the border of the path.

King saw no easy escape from his position. He

was possessed of no weapon of offence to offset that in his opponent's hand. He was unwilling to shut the door — in that event the man would certainly revenge himself upon the property before he left. But while he was keenly waiting with tense nerves for the return of the attack, and vaguely wondering how he might best meet it, he heard the voice of Eleanor from behind him.

"Drop that!" she said commandingly, and the tramp's hand went reluctantly down to his side, and King saw a gray rifle barrel slide out past his shoulder.

"Drop it, I say!" the girl repeated, and the tramp let the stone fall on the path.

"Damn you!" he snarled, and he took out from his pocket a dirty red handkerchief, and wiped his face, which was bleeding from King's blow. Then he glared at them malevolently, but he went and picked up his hat and set it on his head.

"Now get away from here," ordered Eleanor, lowering her weapon; and he went.

They watched him go slouching slowly down the road through the orchard, muttering vengefully, and then they turned back into the kitchen and King shut the door. The girl laid the rifle on a table, and sat down rather abruptly in a chair. The young woman to whose assistance the visitor had

come, had sunk into another chair and was regarding him somewhat curiously.

"Oh, I forgot," said Eleanor. "Elizabeth, let me present Mr. King — my sister."

"I'm very glad to meet you, Miss Hyde," said the novelist, politely. He turned back to the younger girl; there was a high color in her face and her brown eyes were very bright. He thought her astonishingly pretty in her limp grace now that the hard tension of the situation had relaxed; and it sprang hotly into his desire to tell her that she was the most charming and fascinating rifleman that ever lived; he conquered the desire with difficulty.

"Was your rifle loaded?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," Eleanor replied. "Hiram — our hired man — was out for rabbits with it yesterday. The cartridges were right beside it."

"It was very good in you to come to my assistance," the young man began to say, but the elder Miss Hyde interrupted him.

"I think first I ought to thank you for coming to mine," she put in.

King was a trifle ill at ease.

"Oh, not at all," he protested rather awkwardly. "One naturally expects a man to do what he can in such a place, but it's rather unusual for a girl

to carry the situation through. Your sister really deserves the credit."

"Why, I think you both deserve more credit than I," the younger girl replied. "You stood the man off alone, Elizabeth, until we arrived, and then Mr. King fought him on even terms. I had the advantage of a gun."

"I thought you said you were defective in desperate characters around here," King remarked to her.

"We have had very few tramps hereabouts," the elder Miss Hyde responded. "They seldom get so far from the railroad, and we're not on any main road to anywhere — except Perkins Mills."

The younger girl was still sitting rather limply in her chair, but her eyes brightened as she turned toward the visitor.

"Mr. King," she said, "I don't know that I'm much of a judge, but I thought you hit him perfectly beautifully."

Miss Elizabeth looked somewhat startled, but the novelist laughed.

"It's all in getting in the first blow," he said; "but I don't know quite what else I could have done if you hadn't come to the rescue." He turned to the older sister. "And you showed good nerve in refusing to give him anything."

"I didn't think he looked hungry," said Miss Hyde, simply.

"Yes, I'm glad, too, that you didn't give him anything," Eleanor said. "I think it would be much nicer to give it to Mr. King, instead, don't you?"

"Very much," replied Miss Elizabeth. "Won't you stay to dinner, Mr. King?"

The young man laughed again.

"Do I look honestly and respectably hungry?" he inquired. "It seems to me that this is a rather unprofitable alternative for you, and not strictly fair to one of the parties engaged in the contest. You always stood to lose a dinner; there was no way by which you could have gained anything; and besides, if the tramp had conquered, would you have invited him to dinner in my place?" he argued.

"We might have had to," replied Eleanor. "Sometimes one is obliged to entertain — even in the country," she said lightly.

"A somewhat crude example of social obligations," King answered. "In that case I'm very glad I arrived early," he said more seriously to Miss Elizabeth.

"Then you'll stay, won't you?" the older Miss Hyde asked.

"Thank you — I should like to, if you're sure it won't make you any trouble," he responded.

"I think all the trouble for to-day is over. And I'm very glad you consented peaceably — I should have insisted on your staying, anyway — the man might come back," Eleanor said with a smile.

"Oh, I don't believe he will. You see, he didn't get anything, so it won't be necessary for him to make a dinner call," the visitor remarked gravely.

Meanwhile Eleanor had been speculating upon possible ways in which she might entertain her guest.

"What would you like to do between now and dinner-time?" she asked him.

King might truthfully have answered that he could think of no preferable way of passing this interim to looking at her.

"What were you thinking of doing?" said he, cautiously.

"Well, there's nothing very much to see about the farm," Eleanor said reflectively. "You've already seen the barn, and you know where the axle grease is kept."

"And the jack," the young man hastened to add.

"Certainly," the girl conceded. "We've really

nothing especially decorative or amusing on the place."

"Not pigs?" said King. "Not a single lovable litter of fascinating baby pigs?"

"Not a pig," said Miss Hyde, mournfully. "But there are the cows, you know."

"Ah, the cows!" the novelist responded. "The ones you mentioned before. The ones whose milk is so popular."

"Yes; the same ones," replied Eleanor, seriously. "And they're all down in a lot where there are a great many marsh marigolds — but it's very muddy."

"Yes, it's very muddy," Miss Elizabeth agreed.

"I'm afraid it's too muddy," said the younger girl, with thoughtful regret.

"I'm sorry," replied King, sympathetically. "Not a cow — not a marsh marigold. What a pity!"

"But if we should go up on top of the hill in the north pasture lot, there is a view," Eleanor proposed. "You can see Burnham from there."

"But I've just come from Burnham," the young man protested.

"From the top of the hill the view also extends a considerable distance in the other direction," his hostess remarked reprovingly. "You can see

Perkins Mills at this time of year — before the leaves are fully out."

King was inclined to think that it was a matter of complete indifference to him what else he saw, so long as he might see this girl with the smooth brown hair and the soft voice and the quiet eyes.

"Then by all means let us go up on top of that hill," said he. "Otherwise we may be outstripped by the hurrying foliage, and I have always possessed a flaring, scarlet desire to gaze upon Perkins Mills — from a distance."

Eleanor accepted this profession without comment. She opened the door.

"You don't suppose that tramp will come back, do you?" she inquired of Miss Elizabeth. "I don't like to leave you alone here. Oh, well, it's all right, anyway — there comes Hiram, now." The hired man was seen entering the red barn. "Come on," she said to the visitor.

She led the way around the corner of the house, and across a field bright emerald with winter wheat which had sprung magically up in the warmth of the May sunshine, and through some lowered bars into the north pasture lot which lay steep and stony up a long slanting hill. There was a gusty breeze blowing across the sunny hillside, and King noticed how it moulded the girl's

light dress to her graceful figure and caught up a wisp of her smooth hair and carried it across her face and flecked the blood faintly to the surface of her clear skin. He thought her even prettier than he had thought her at the first flash, when she had sat at the top of the steps against the background of the old house with the afternoon sunshine falling across her, watching the yellow horse pull the buggy which contained King and Burgess slowly up the road. Now she went lightly up the abrupt hillside, and the city man followed on with more difficulty. The close-cropped grass had begun to show a brighter tinge, and many birds were calling from the woods beyond the stone wall to the west. White dotted along the rise were trembling anemones, and over along the edge of the trees the buds of wild azaleas were commencing to show faint pink. And everywhere — by the rocks and through the pasture and down the side of the splashing brook away over to the east were violets — violets flung with wanton generosity on the lap of the earth from the unsparing hand of the springtime, violets of every shade of blue from the deepest purple to the faintest, lightest tint of delicate lavender, — beauty ground-spangled by the careless profusion of nature.

"And you were speaking of marsh marigolds — mere marsh marigolds," said King, reproachfully.

Eleanor turned her head and gave a rather approving look at her companion. The man who could beat a brawny, swaggering tramp into subjection, and immediately afterward step out and dwell with a fine and sincere appreciation upon a lonely pasture lot dotted with vernal flowers, was gifted with a range of temperamental temperature she could not help but like.

"It *is* nice, isn't it?" she said, stopping at the top of the hill and resting her hand on a great gray boulder beneath which the bloodroot had put forth its snowy, gold-centred blossoms, and where the creamy sprays of whiteheart and the fragile saxifrage were growing. The beauty of the rough slope and the grace of the flowers were not lost upon her.

"'Nice' is absurdly inadequate; it's simply beautiful — it's the awakening of the world-princess," King replied, but he looked rather at the girl. "This is part of why I came."

"What do you mean?" asked Eleanor, who did not understand.

Her companion explained.

"I've been writing a story of New England —

I write stories for my living — and I came up here to take a final plunge in the atmosphere," he said. He swept his arm about him. "This is it — I only wish I could put it on paper — the sky and the hills and the sunshine and the whole background. A good background isn't common — a background that convinces you is scarcer yet."

The girl regarded him with quickened interest.

"I should think it *would* be difficult to do that sort of thing," she said. "What is the name of the story to be?" she inquired.

King smiled at the essentially feminine question, but he was secretly pleased because she had asked it.

"I think I shall call it *Harmony Dale* — that's the name of the girl in it," he replied.

"'*Harmony Dale*' — I like that," Eleanor said slowly. "Are you writing now, did you say? How nearly finished is it?" she asked.

"It's almost finished," the novelist answered. "I came up here just to get the inspiration — if one can call it that — for the finishing touches."

The girl looked thoughtfully down the slanting hillside over the bright, fresh-green field of growing wheat to where the big red barn stood on a knoll and the old, low, white house nestled among

the budding elm and maple trees, with a ribbon of gray smoke curling out of its brick chimney and blowing straight across the clear blue sky.

"Well, there it all is — take as much as you please," she said lightly.

King let fly his first arrow.

"My search for inspiration wasn't limited strictly to a matter of scenery," he said.

The girl glanced up at him in quick surprise, and then with just a trace of a frown her eyes went down to the ground when she saw that he was looking directly at her.

"Oh!" she said. And collecting herself, "You shall meet Hiram at dinner; I think you'll find Hiram sufficiently typical for a chapter."

The young man was slightly disconcerted by this parry.

"I'm afraid you misunderstand me. It would, I think, be inexcusably bad form for me to accept your hospitality and then make material out of you."

"Oh, I didn't mean quite that," said Eleanor, relenting.

"Besides," continued King, "neither you nor your sister seem to possess the singular and peculiar characteristics demanded of the rural New Englander in a book. Neither of you says 'Gosh

all hemlock' or 'Gol ding it all,' and you don't appear to be intolerant religiously, and I'm sure you don't when at table scoop up honey with your knife blades. No New Englander would make any kind of a hit in a book unless he or she did all these things."

Eleanor laughed in spite of herself.

"I'm sorry if you're disappointed," she said; "and I think it's quite time to go back to the house. Dinner will be ready."

VII

WHEN Burgess went away from Hamilton King's rooms, after the novelist's servant had innocently disclosed the true reason for his master's somewhat furtive departure, he smiled a little to himself. He was not at all jealous, because he never seriously entered the lists to gain the approval of a maiden's eyes; Burgess was too companionable with men to fear a lonely middle age, and for the present he held that love was a violent and unsafe exercise of the emotions, and shunned danger persistently. And so he was not in the least offended over King's omission to notify him of his intention to revisit Burnham; surely no obligation lay upon King to make public his plans for every casual trip he chose to take. Even though he was convinced that his friend had gone back with the single purpose of seeing again the girl they had together discovered, he was quite complaisant and felt no cause for protest. If it was come in King's jealous belief to a contest, the novelist had taken no unfair advantage. They had both of them admired

Eleanor Hyde—and King had returned to Burnham. Burgess could have himself just as easily done the same thing if his admiration had led him so far. He was not resentful; he was merely mildly amused, because his chance question had so completely opened up the line which his friend had taken. Upon further reflection he was struck with the thought that he (and perhaps he alone) realized the reason why King had started for New England. King himself was not overgiven to introspection, and he might have solemnly persuaded himself that he had gone back to inundate himself for purely literary purposes in the atmosphere of Burnham. It was by no means impossible that he had convinced himself of the complete neutrality of his designs concerning Eleanor, at the moment he had determined to leave New York. Burgess, strongly believing the very opposite, well understanding King and his former carelessness toward girls in general, smiled a little over the thought.

A few days later, while walking down the avenue after dinner, he ran across the novelist, who had returned from his trip.

"Hello, Ham," he said cordially. "Back in town again?"

King looked at his friend with illogical suspicion.

"Oh, yes. Got back yesterday," he said. "How

did you know I'd been away?" he asked after a slight pause.

"Very simple — did you think I was looking for clay on your shoes or something of that sort? I was up at your rooms, and the faithful Griffiths said you were out of the city," Burgess answered with a smile.

This explanation was received by the novelist in silence. His companion was somewhat amused at his reticence and concealment of detail, and pressed the subject.

"Where have you been?" he inquired blandly.

"Oh, looking around for material — as usual," King vaguely replied.

"For the new story? Were you up in New England, then?" persisted Burgess, his amusement and his suspicions waxing alike.

"Yes," the other man answered shortly. He readily foresaw that in one more step the definite terminus of his journey would be demanded of him. "I went back to Burnham," he volunteered curtly.

His friend smiled.

"Of course. I quite forgot. The faithful Griffiths said you had left orders for your mail to be sent there."

King knew perfectly well that Burgess had not

quite forgotten, but it seemed impolitic and superfluous to voice this conviction.

"Did you have a pleasant time?" the questioner continued.

"Yes," said King.

"Did you see Miss Hyde?" the inexorable examiner went on, inwardly mirthful over his companion's reticence.

"Yes," said King. "I happened to meet her walking along a road," he explained carefully. "She asked after you."

"What an odd chance!" Burgess remarked.

"That she should ask after you? I don't see why. It seemed to me only polite and natural," replied the novelist.

"Oh, no—I meant your happening to meet her walking along a road," his friend returned. "By the way, I stopped in at the Brintons' the other evening and told May Brinton about our trip and about the awkward position into which her father had gotten Miss Hyde," he said.

At the risk of betraying an interest, the novelist took up the thread of the topic.

"Indeed? That was very good of you. And what did Miss Brinton say?"

"She was extremely nice about it," Burgess responded. "I suggested that the easiest way

out would be for her to annex Miss Hyde as a real intimate, and back up Mr. Brinton's unwarranted assumption of the two girls' intimacy. Finally she consented."

His companion was not enthusiastic.

"Well, the Brintons will start her on the social whirl with speed to spare if they take her up and carry her along with them," he said dubiously. "You know I warned you, before you told Mr. Brinton about her, of the risk you were running."

"I know you did — you're a horrible pessimist, Ham, but don't you worry," replied the other man, cheerfully. "I dare say she'll get on all right in that set; it'll be a little warm for her at first, but she'll soon get acclimated."

"Nice prospect," was King's comment.

"Oh, it's not such a bad set," protested Miss Hyde's self-appointed social promoter. "To be sure, they have a little more money than they well know what to do with —"

"And they're very erudite spenders, too," his friend interrupted.

"But they're fairly decent, all things considered," Burgess finished.

"'Fairly decent' — a nice qualification for desirability!" the novelist retorted scornfully. "You know perfectly well, Ollie, that they're just a bla-

tant gang of overfed, overdressed, overfinanced vulgarians—cursed nouveaux riches of the worst sort."

"Oh, not the worst sort—you don't mean that," his companion replied gently. "They're not really so bad as that. Of course they've all of them got money—there's no denying that," he conceded; "some of them have too much, and a good many of them haven't had it so long that their paper currency has gotten much mussed; but, after all, money's a mighty good thing to have, my son."

"Perhaps—for some people," King grudgingly admitted.

"It would be devilish inconvenient for either of us not to have any—I know that," his friend stated. "And if we had as much as Brinton and his crowd, we very likely wouldn't spend it half so well. I'm curious to see how Miss Hyde gets on with them. They ought to like her—she's so pretty and graceful and unaffected, and she seems clever, too."

"Oh, I fancy she's clever enough," agreed the novelist, with an elaborate affectation of carelessness.

The insincerity of his indifference did not escape the attention of his companion, who was studying him attentively.

"Perhaps one of those younger men will marry her," he suggested optimistically, watching the effect of his words on his companion: "Teddy Markham, or Eliot Frame, or Grosvenor Chandler, or some one of those chaps."

Involuntarily King's face hardened. The suspicion that he was being delicately drawn out did not deter him from expressing his opinion of this contingency.

"That *would* be fine!" he said with almost a tang of bitterness. "Teddy Markham's an amusing little fool, but he's shallow and conceited and caddish; Eliot Frame drinks enough to saturate the Sahara, and he'll never do anything in the world after he gets too fat to play polo — besides, he's devoted to young Pauline Rawlins, who's much too good for him; and I don't know Chandler at all, but if he measures down to the other two, he's a pretty fierce candidate for a nice girl."

Burgess was really startled by the venom in his friend's tones. He glanced at him in surprise.

"Well, if she's clever — and you say she is — she'll be able to look out for herself," he replied. "And maybe Mr. Brinton himself will fancy her and beat out the younger set; he's a formidable competitor in almost any game. He seemed to

like her pretty keenly — and he's decent enough, as you yourself admitted."

"I suppose he can count on his daughter's assistance," suggested the novelist.

"Well, there *is* a slight hitch there," his companion admitted. "I presume that if May suspected that her father was contemplating anything of that sort, friendly relations between her and Miss Hyde would be smashed with astonishing celerity. The stepmother motif jangles on May badly. And, by the way, she said she would like to meet you some time; she said I might bring you up to call."

King reflected that this might make toward strengthening the connections between him and the town of Burnham. Besides, he felt that he had displayed an over-interest in the affairs of Miss Hyde, and that he could counteract that impression upon Burgess by evincing an interest elsewhere.

"Thank you; I should like to know her. They say she's very attractive," he replied.

"Good! When would you like to go?" Burgess asked.

"Oh, almost any time," replied his friend.

The other man took out his watch.

"How about right now?" said he. "It's only half-past eight."

"All right," the novelist answered, after reflecting a moment. Burgess beckoned to the driver of a hansom which was cruising along the curb, and ten minutes later they had drawn up before the residence of the Brintons. The next moment they fell into a curious difficulty.

Mr. Brinton's front door swung to admit them almost as soon as Burgess had pressed the electric button, and the figure of the butler was disclosed in the doorway. But the official dignity of this ponderous domestic was quite lacking, the young men were surprised to note, and his attitude betokened frightened helplessness, and he recognized one of the visitors with evident relief.

"Oh, Mr. Burgess!" he began to say, and he gave a nervous glance over his shoulder into the drawing-room, and lowered his voice. Following his glance the two callers could see away at the farther end of the room the broad back of a man's figure. The first thought that flashed upon each of them was that some anarchist, attracted by Mr. Brinton's reputation and display of wealth, had managed to force his way into the home of the millionnaire.

"What's the matter? — quick!" Burgess exclaimed softly in the butler's ear.

The servant nodded toward the entrance of the drawing-room.

"It's Mr. Frame, sir," he responded in low, scared tones; "Mr. Eliot Frame, sir."

Both of the visitors felt an instant jump of relief; the anarchist theory at least could be discarded. Eliot Frame was a popular young man about town, whose presence in the house was certainly not inexplicable; he was known to be a friend of the Brintons.

"Well, what's the trouble?" Burgess asked.

"Mr. Frame just came in," the butler answered, "and I took up his card to Miss Brinton; and I didn't notice anything wrong, sir, until I came back and said Miss Brinton was dressing to go out but would be down directly; and then I saw Mr. Frame had been — had been drinking."

"Drinking? He's drunk?" said Burgess.

The servant was glad to use the term he hesitated to introduce.

"Yes, sir, he's very drunk. And when I asked him to go away, he said he'd smash my head; and he wouldn't let me go to tell Miss Brinton, and just then you rang the bell, sir, and I opened the door and he stepped in there."

King and Burgess glanced at each other with a mixture of apprehension and disgust.

"And if Miss Brinton comes down and sees him this way, I shall lose my place for letting him in — I ought to lose it, sir," the man said in real distress. "What shall I do, sir?"

"Wait a moment," Burgess replied. "You needn't take our cards to Miss Brinton. Stay here, and if she comes down, ask her not to come into the drawing-room — to go back for a moment." He reflected that, although Frame was a big, athletic young fellow, he could doubtless be handled, if it should come to physical force, by King, himself, and the butler in alliance; and yet he disliked the idea of entering upon an actual fight in the capitalist's drawing-room, with the very strong likelihood that the young hostess would appear in the midst of it. It was an unsavory possibility decidedly repugnant to both the visitors.

"You stay here in the hall," said Burgess to the butler. He hoped that Miss Brinton was making a protracted and elaborate toilet. "We'll go in and try to persuade him to get out of the house," he said to King, and they entered the room together.

Eliot Frame was standing at the farther end, leaning rather unsteadily over the back of a chair and apparently studying with remarkable attention,

but with glassy and unseeing eyes, a painting in which ordinarily he would not have felt the slightest interest. He turned around when he heard footsteps coming down the room.

"Why, h'lo, Ollie!" His face was flushed and he spoke thickly.

"Good evening, Eliot," Burgess replied. "You know Mr. King, don't you?"

Frame leered affably at the novelist.

"Know him? Sure know him. H'lo, King, glad see you. Jus' finish' one 'v your books yes'-day. Damn popular book — damn silly story, *I* thought. Nev' min' — bett'r luck nex' time, ol' man."

Burgess had no time to spare over appreciating this frank criticism of his companion's literary work; Miss Brinton might appear at any moment.

"Look here, Eliot," he said sharply, "I don't know how you happened to come here this evening, but you had no business to come, and you ought to have known better. Now if you're a gentleman, you won't make any fuss, but you'll get out right away. You're in no condition to make a call; don't you know you're drunk?"

Frame was not in the least offended but by no means complaisant.

"Came here make dinner call," he responded argumentatively. "Goin' to make it. Easy enough say drunk—*I* know bett'r. Nottal. Had drink, admit, two drinks, fifty drinks, perhaps, but not drunk. Goin' shtay see May."

"You're in no condition to see any one," said Burgess. "You can't see her."

"Can' see her? Easy enough say can' see her. Goin' shtay see her. You wan' me get out so you see her?" said the other young man, with thick suspicion.

Burgess was desperate; all this conversation was taking up time. He could not permit himself to be drawn into a verbose argument; it was better far to concede almost anything and get the man away. He now realized that he should have sent the butler to warn Miss Brinton to stay upstairs a few minutes; he wondered why it had not occurred to King to do this.

"You f'lers wan' me to get out so you see her," said Frame, with deep alcoholic sagacity. "Foxy boys. But can't fool baby Eliot—what?" He sat down heavily in a large chair. "Ex'lent plot f'r a novel," he remarked politely but somewhat incoherently to King.

A plan came into the mind of Burgess.

"Not at all," he protested. "I just heard you

were here and stopped in to take you down to the club. There are a lot of chaps down there, and they said if I saw you to bring you back."

"Down at club? Who?" Frame asked, wavering in his resolution.

Burgess named them.

"B'lieve I'll go," said the young man, with tipsy reflectiveness. With a tremendous effort to appear keenly alert he looked at the others. "You both come along?" he asked warily.

"Yes," replied Burgess, with a depth of gratification he did not attempt to conceal; "come on."

"'Ll right — come on," said the inebriated one, now convinced, getting to his feet with an effort.

"Get his coat and hat," King said in a low voice to the butler.

They assisted him into his coat and put his hat into his hand, and Burgess took hold of his arm. Frame slightly resented this assistance, but finally, under guidance of his friend, he lurched unsteadily out into the hall. He seemed to be getting drunker; it was difficult to see how the butler could have helped but notice his condition when he arrived. At the front door there was a hitch; an idea occurred to the intoxicated outgoer.

"Say," he remarked not irrationally, "what'll

May think? Sent up card to May. Got to shtay see her 'n' explain — sorry, called away club — 'stremely 'mportn' — honor at stake."

King barely choked down a laugh at this scarcely lucid or convincing explanation of Frame's departure, but Burgess was in haste.

"Oh, come along, Eliot," he said. "That'll be all right. You can tell her to-morrow, or, if you like, I'll telephone her from the club."

The inebriated one hung back with heavy obstinacy; he was not satisfied.

"Won' do," said he, firmly, planting his feet apart. "Got shtay 'xplain May 'bout why leaving — what?" A sudden plan came into his fuddled mind; he waved an unsteady arm at King, beaming at him from bloodshot eyes.

"You shtay," he directed. "Jus' th' man 'n right place. You shtay 'xplain May 'bout my honor at stake."

"Oh, very well," said the novelist, desperately. "Go ahead — I'll stay." He purposed waiting until the man got down the steps and out on the sidewalk, and then making good his escape.

"Good," said the drunken man, very much pleased. "You tell her all 'bout my honor at stake," he commanded. "Tell her any ol' thing you please," he said genially. "Goo' night." He

permitted himself to be led through the doorway, and with a feeling of relief King heard the heavy door click shut. He waited a moment — but he waited too long. As he stood with his hand on the door-knob a young lady in evening dress began to descend the stairs. Below her she caught sight of a man standing with his back turned toward her, and she not unnaturally assumed him to be the caller who had sent his card to her. It was impossible for King to open the door and walk out; it was necessary for him to remain and explain his presence in the house.

"Good evening, Eliot," the girl called down. "Why are you standing out here? Why didn't you go in and sit down?"

King felt a hot wave of confusion go over him, and he turned toward the butler with a vague idea of telling the girl that he had gotten into the house by a mistake, a statement he knew the servant would gladly corroborate. To his distress the man had vanished.

"I'm sorry I had to keep you waiting so long," Miss Brinton commenced to say, when King turned and faced her, and she perceived he was not the man whom she had thought herself to be addressing. She flushed with annoyance.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said hastily; then,

noticing his hesitation, "whom did you wish to see?" she asked.

The novelist looked rather helplessly about him; escape was not to be considered.

"Is this — are you Miss Brinton?" he inquired with hesitation.

The girl had come down to the bottom of the stairs, and she stood there, regarding him with a little perplexity but quite coolly.

"Yes; I am Miss Brinton," she replied. There was an indefinable, latent suspicion in her tones. "You wish to see me?"

Truly nothing could have been more distant from King's desire. But the butler had evidently gone, not to return.

"I shall have to beg your pardon — for what looks like an intrusion," he said. "My name is King — Hamilton King."

The suspicion on the face of the young lady cleared a little, but a very puzzled look took its place. She surveyed the stranger at a glance, and satisfied herself that, whoever he might be, he looked at all events a gentleman; his voice and manners and appearance bore it out convincingly. This granted, he must needs be the man whom he represented himself to be. But how came Hamilton King alone into the Brinton house, and

evidently quite ready to go away without an explanation?

"You are Mr. King?" she said. "But I got the card of Eliot Frame."

The novelist felt that an adequate explanation of his presence and the disappearance of the other man was simply out of the question.

"Yes," he said. He could not think of anything to add to the monosyllable.

Miss Brinton conceived a theory.

"Did you send up one of Mr. Frame's cards by mistake?" she inquired.

For an instant King felt a flash of hope — until he remembered that this would not account for his own presence, for he had no excuse for coming alone to see her. Even so, perhaps he could invent some clumsy excuse for coming to the house, but her next words dissuaded him from this course.

"Eliot said he might call this evening."

The visitor decided to disclose a part of the truth.

"He *was* here."

Miss Brinton's surprise increased.

"*Was* here? Why did he go away?"

"He wasn't well — he was suddenly taken ill. Oliver Burgess brought me here — you had kindly told him he might, I believe — and when we arrived

we found him so, and Burgess took him off — to a doctor. They asked me to stay and tell you."

The girl was startled.

"Eliot ill!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you leave him here and send for a doctor? And when I came down you acted as though you were just about to go away. Are you really Hamilton King? I don't quite understand all this."

"It's all quite true," the visitor assured her. "Frame was ill and Burgess took him away. And I am Hamilton King; I can show you my watch or my card-case if you wish me to prove my identity," he added rather aggrievedly.

"Oh, no," his hostess protested quickly. She considered carefully what he had last said. Frame had been ill and Burgess had taken him away. A light broke upon her; she regarded King attentively. "Was Eliot drunk?" she inquired.

The novelist felt a jerk of astonishment at the matter-of-fact way in which this query had been delivered by this apparently refined young girl. He was silent.

"If he was drunk, I think you might just as well say so," remarked Miss Brinton, with a smile; "because that would explain everything."

Her guest felt that a further concealment of the truth was futile. Evidently the girl was ac-

"'If he was drunk, I think you might just as well say so.'"

quainted with Frame's failings and would not be especially shocked over the disclosure of what had occurred.

"And I had warned him never to come here drunk," said the young hostess, with slight reproach.

"Well, he was," the novelist asserted curtly.

This statement seemed to afford Miss Brinton both gratification and relief.

"I thought so," she said. "And so you and Oliver Burgess had to put him out. Did you have a bad time?—I didn't hear any noise. It was very stupid of Banks to let him in."

King had not yet recovered from his wonder over the easy liberality of Miss Brinton's evident attitude concerning the subject of intoxication in her friends.

"Oh, that's all right; it wasn't the slightest trouble," he answered. "Burgess persuaded him to go, and he went right along."

"Well, I'm very much obliged to both of you—you and Mr. Burgess," said the girl. She remembered her burden of hospitality. "And now that this is all satisfactorily explained, won't you come in? I'm awfully glad to know you."

King thought her satisfaction strangely gained, but he was quite willing to stay.

"I'm not keeping you from anything?" he hazarded, noting her evening gown.

"I'm going on to the Arnold Parkers' pretty soon — they're giving a good-by ball before they start around the world in Mr. Wheeler's yacht; but I don't have to go for fifteen minutes — unless you put me out as you did Eliot," said his hostess, glancing at the tall hall clock, and she led the way into the drawing-room. "I think this is good fun," she said as she seated herself. "Now we're exactly where we would have been if Oliver Burgess had formally and properly introduced us and then fled, but we really know each other ever so much better."

King laughed.

"That's certainly true," he said. "For besides a great deal I've heard about you, I've found out for myself several things in the last minute. I've found out that you are not easily disturbed by an emergency, and that you are courteous to respectable-looking intruders, and that your views upon intemperance are far from puritanical, when you don't absolutely meet it face to face."

"Well, I didn't think you were a sneak-thief, because you didn't run, so I had no cause to be excited," said Miss Brinton, in reply; "and I'd told Ollie Burgess he might bring you here, —

which he did, — so I couldn't very well order you out; and as for the views on intemperance, don't you think I know that Eliot Frame gets drunk?"

King was on the point of suggesting that had she arrived on the scene one minute earlier, the demonstration of her friend's alcoholic propensities would have been thoroughly satisfactory to the most sceptical of her moods. He seated himself and looked fairly at her for the first time. As she sat, posed a little recklessly, with her white gown contrasting strikingly with the dark background and her black eyes alight and challenging, he thought her decidedly pretty. But to his mind, for all May Brinton possessed the poise of pride in a beauty she was ready to assert to the world, she lacked the quiet grace and the unconscious, girlish charm of Eleanor Hyde. It seemed to him that, while they were both of them attractive, they were very antitheses of attraction.

"I had the pleasure of meeting your father last week," King said, swinging the subject away from the luckless Frame.

"Yes. Up in Burnham. Ollie Burgess told me about it. I hear that papa distinguished himself," the young hostess replied.

"He certainly did," said the caller. "He took hold of a Methodist fair and turned it into an

African vaudeville with the assistance of his train crew, and to judge from the success of his efforts upon one denomination, I should say that in three days more your respected parent would have demoralized the entire community. If he spends much time in Burnham this summer he'll be fortunate if he gets off without being elected chairman of the town council, president of the village improvement society, and local delegate to all the good roads conventions, and things of that sort. In fact, I think your father will have some difficulty in declining all the honorable and strictly unremunerative offices the town affords."

"If papa starts in he's hard to stop," replied Miss Brinton, with a smile.

"And I met your friend, Miss Hyde, too," said the novelist.

His hostess was not particularly pleased by the close association of the names of her father and her schoolmate. She frowned almost imperceptibly, but, in accord with her promise to Burgess, she felt it needful to assume the position of friendliness.

"Oh, yes — Eleanor Hyde," she replied. "Isn't it pleasant for me that she will be there? I've hardly seen her since I left Allingwood. How did you like her?"

"I liked her very much indeed," said King, with an under energy to the way in which his approval was voiced which caught the girl's attention. She sat up more stiffly in the big, dark chair, and her bright eyes seemed to contract a little. Was it that May Brinton disliked to share admiration with any girl, or did she see down the future that some day the country girl might become unconsciously a bar against her happiness?

"Yes — she's very attractive," she conceded with positive reluctance.

"Isn't she, though?" said King, blundering badly in his for once tactless enthusiasm.

"Yes," said Miss Brinton, curtly and icily.

VIII

JOHN S. BRINTON came out on the piazza of his country place and stood with both hands in his pockets, his feet braced a little apart, and his head thrown slightly back — the attitude he assumed when dictating to a stenographer or a board of directors. He looked out over the wide green slope of turf which was still aflash in the sunlight with morning dew. But for the singing of birds about the place, and in the house back of him the rattle of dishes where servants were setting the table in the breakfast room, it was very still. No breath of breeze stirred; all the flowers hung listlessly in the early sunshine; the air was soft and sweet.

Unluckily the beauty of all this was wholly lost on Mr. Brinton. Nature was far too restful for his practical energy; and he did not care for anything beyond what a poor man might not possess or a rich man buy. At any rate he positively declined to evince even a spurious admiration for scenic and atmospheric conditions while his

stomach was empty; at eight-fifteen in the morning the call of a catbird did not appeal to him with one-half the genuine pleasure that the smell of a broiling beefsteak did; he wanted his breakfast, and yet he did not wish to eat it alone.

But he was encouraged by hearing from upstairs the sounds of windows being lowered and feet moving about. Evidently some dauntless soul had determined that eight o'clock was a plausible rising hour. Mr. Brinton reflected with a feeling of slight irritation that the enterprise of the people he had brought to Burnham was certainly not extended in the direction of getting up with the sun; on the contrary his house party seemed to display an almost abnormal caution against premature awakening. He took out his watch — a split-second repeater with most unexpected attachments — and shut it again with an impatient click. Twenty minutes after eight! At length there came the noise of some one descending the stairway, of a match being struck in the hall, and the first of Mr. Brinton's guests appeared. Stuffy Smith came out on the piazza, drawing the smoke of his matinal cigarette deeply into his lungs.

Stuffy Smith was a chunky young man with molasses-colored hair which he parted exactly in the centre and licked straight down to each side.

He possessed a sandy complexion, a large nose, round, pale blue eyes, clothes of pronounced and unbecoming checks, and a willingness, which at times stretched into a positive anxiety, to make himself agreeable. Although by no means top-heavy with intellect, he had managed after protracted efforts to graduate from Princeton, where he had displayed considerable proficiency in manipulating a banjo, and in nothing else. Most people ascribed his nickname to an academic foundation; this was false—it depicted no characteristic of its owner, but was legitimately abbreviated from Sturtevant. And as no one by any chance called him Sturtevant except his mother (with whom he was never seen), the common supposition of his nickname was quite excusable.

"Hello, Stuffy!" said Mr. Brinton. "Sleep well?"

"Fine, Mr. Brinton," answered the chunky youth. "My eyes shut right up with a click, and I slept like a dead horse. How about you, sir?"

"Oh, so-so," his host conceded. "Ready for a bite of breakfast?"

As Mr. Smith was invariably ready for any pursuit which did not necessitate the employment of intellect, the morning meal was naturally no

exception. He took one long last inhale of the cigarette, snapped it rather regretfully on to the lawn, and followed his commander into the breakfast room. And just as they had seated themselves at the table, the next members of the party made their appearance.

The presence of the Rawlins sisters at the Brinton house may, perhaps, demand some explanation. For a number of generations the Rawlins family had been more or less famous in New York for its shuddering exclusiveness. An invitation to the Rawlins ball, which each year the head of the clan gave, was eagerly besought by every social aspirant; the ball itself was usually desperately dull and hideously stupid with respectability and formality, but one's very presence there seemed to be considered overwhelming evidence — almost a positive guarantee — of one's social desirability. But the pride of Mr. Wilhelmus Rawlins had been irritated by the assault upon society of the modern millionnaires, and he had unwisely attempted to compete with them on their own ground. In this ill-advised attempt he had made reckless investments, which had turned out very badly, and the outcome of the matter was that he lost almost all the family property and was left with scarcely anything but the unsupported and tottering dignity

of an empty name. In the midst of his humiliations he died. His widow accepted the situation with considerable fortitude, and, reefing all sail, went about on a surprisingly practical tack. She was clever enough to foresee the coming ascendancy of the set of people who had overthrown her husband, and although it was of no advantage to her (and too late, besides) to join them in their rise, she determined that her two daughters should share their future success. So she had boldly taken the girls out of the old Knickerbocker circle and planted them among the very people who had upset her husband and whose new gains had in a measure been her own loss. There were those who unkindly said that Mrs. Rawlins, seeing no other way of recovering the family fortune, had cold-bloodedly determined to marry her daughters among those who had gained it; some went so far as to assert that, not content with losing the family's property, she was handing over its honorable name to the same upstarts; it may have been Mrs. Rawlins's secret opinion that she was contemplating a fair exchange. At any rate Alice and Pauline were readily welcomed in the ranks of the newly rich, whom they found not nearly so much to their dislike as they had apprehended.

"Ah," said Mr. Brinton, "up bright and early,

girls? Fresh as roses, both of you — hey, Stuffy?" he commented genially.

The slightly disconcerted Smith, whose embarrassment was augmented by the fact that he tremendously admired Miss Alice and by the latent conviction that she covertly despised him, added to the knowledge that Miss Pauline always openly laughed at him, hurriedly rose, dropping his napkin on the floor, and said good morning. The Rawlins sisters, who honestly liked Mr. Brinton as a type of man of whom up to the time of their début they had had no sight, sat down quietly and commenced to eat strawberries and cream, making appropriate remarks about the loveliness of the weather.

"It's the goods all right, isn't it?" agreed their host. "Now you wouldn't believe," he added, "that Stuffy, here, and I have been on a ten-mile horseback ride already, just to give us an appetite for breakfast."

And as the two young ladies were beginning to express their surprise over this exhibition of enterprise, Oliver Burgess came into the room, and then May Brinton hurried in, apologizing for her tardiness.

"I always try to be on time the first morning, although I never am," she said. "After that, I

don't care — I usually have my breakfast in my room; aunt always does."

At this point Eliot Frame swaggered slowly into the room and sat creakingly down beside Pauline Rawlins. Eliot had satisfactorily proved that his intoxication, on the night of his call upon May, had been unexpectedly sudden and wholly accidental, and in his renaissance of morality he was now quite restored to the favor of the liberal-minded and easy-going Brintons. He included the whole table in one comprehensive salutation, and then his eyes rested on the yellow-haired Princeton man, who was inverting a coffee cup under his prominent nose.

"Why, Stuffy!" he said in assumed astonishment, "you here? I didn't expect they'd get you up before noon."

"Oh, I'm a regular lark," replied the chunky Smith. "The early bird gets the worm, you know."

"The early bird in this case, however, isn't so much of a lark as a jay," Burgess put in, looking up from a muffin.

The party laughed at this mild sally, and Stuffy, having no skill at repartee, wisely remained silent. The elder Miss Rawlins unexpectedly interposed in his behalf.

"Really, you're doing Mr. Smith an injustice this time," she remarked to the ex-inebriate. "He took a long horseback ride before breakfast with Mr. Brinton."

"Why, papa hasn't been on a horse in ten years," May asserted from across the table.

Miss Rawlins in her well-meant endeavor to champion the cause of justice found herself instantly and unexpectedly put on the defensive. She was quite disconcerted by her host's next words.

"You're pretty near right, May. The last time I rode was in the presidential campaign of ninety-six; they made me an aide to the grand marshal in a big parade, and I had to be strapped to the saddle. If the brute had fallen down on that slippery pavement going up Broadway, I'd have broken my leg sure; I haven't been on a horse since."

"But didn't you say that you and Mr. Smith had ridden ten miles before breakfast?" Alice persisted.

"No," said the capitalist, cheerfully; "I said you wouldn't believe we'd done so, but I seem to have been mistaken — you did believe it."

The fact that Mr. Brinton had played upon her credulity did not annoy the girl as much as the

fact that Smith had apparently accepted without protest the credit for something he had not done. She made no reply when all the rest of the table laughed; and the innocent Stuffy, who would likely have disclaimed on his own account Mr. Brinton's first statement had he not been interrupted by the entrance of Burgess and May, appreciated that he had fallen still lower in the measure of Miss Rawlins's favor. His large, round, pale blue eyes looked almost mutely beseeching as he put down his cup; but Alice, who was a little annoyed, was inflexibly unforgiving.

"Good morning, every one," said Charlotte Worthington, as she briskly swished into the room and seated herself next Eliot Frame.

Charlotte Worthington was a somewhat heavy young lady, who attempted to be agile and sprightly in the mistaken hope that her activity would distract attention from her weight. But her clumsy capers excited only a part of the comment she provoked among those she met, because in several other ways she was a fool. She was twenty-seven or eight, but she affected to be seven or eight years younger. This called to notice the fact that she must be ashamed of her true age, and it was consequently estimated all the way from thirty to thirty-five. Then she

was of a temperament which reached longingly into romance but reached in vain. She passionately desired to be some sort of heroine, but passing heroes would have none of her; they usually took especial precautions to pass at a safe distance. The only man who had ever asked her to marry him had been offensively red-haired and quite insignificant; at the time, she had been convinced that he wished to marry her for her money; as time went on, although firmly retaining this original conviction, she began to regret that she had not accepted him and let him earn what he desired. Miss Worthington was a curious girl at best, and her presence was apt to stir up a very gamut of feelings in the people she encountered. She met derision, sympathy, anger, amusement, pity, contempt, and irritation. Yet she managed to be asked about a great deal, and she almost unexceptionally accepted.

This completed the number of Mr. Brinton's guests, with the exception of Thatcher Vanderveer, a young stockbroker, who was on an enforced vacation, having been scared off the floor of the exchange by the threat of nervous prostration. Vanderveer elected to protract his sleep to its natural limit, for which indulgence, under the circumstances, no one blamed him.

Mr. Brinton pushed back his chair from the table and took out from his pocket two large cigars, one of which he handed to Smith.

"Well, what are you all going to do this morning?" he said briskly.

There was no reply; the party was open to all reasonable propositions.

"Is there a lake near here?" Charlotte Worthington inquired. Her longing for romantic situations would have been gratified in a measure could she have inveigled one of the men into taking her out in a skiff and spending the forenoon in the shade of an overhanging willow while she read him selections from Rossetti and Swinburne in a low, languorous voice. Added to this, there was the delightful possibility that she might contrive to fall overboard and be borne ashore in the strong arms of some gallant rescuer. This somewhat illogically seemed to put a heavy obligation upon the rescuer, for all common sense interposed in vain; although Miss Worthington swam but weakly, she would have been quite willing to risk such a performance.

"There isn't any lake," said Mr. Brinton, shortly, and a calamity was averted from some unfortunate swain reluctant.

"I'm so sorry," Charlotte sighed.

"But," said the capitalist, brightening, "that reminds me. I'm told that over at Perkins Mills, a town near here, they're going to drain off the mill-pond this morning. Who'd like to go over and see the fun?"

"What *is* the fun in seeing a mill-pond drained? It sounds stupid," said Frame.

"Are there any festivities incidental to the drainage operations proper?" Burgess inquired. "Exercises at the schoolhouse, or a speech by the county drainage commissioner, or something of that sort? It doesn't sound very thrilling *per se*."

"It isn't," the host admitted. "But the interesting feature is this: it's the eels. They say there are simply enormous numbers of eels in that pond," he stated with dramatic emphasis, "and I thought it might be amusing to see them all wriggling around in the mud — after the water was drawn off — and men with big boots wading in and spearing them."

Miss Worthington simulated a shriek, Alice Rawlins stifled a shudder, and Eliot Frame laughed. The pale blue eyes of Stuffy Smith lit up a little.

"I'd like to go first rate," he announced. A brilliant idea occurred to him; he would expiate his disfavor in the eyes of Miss Rawlins by invit-

ing her to accompany him. "Don't you want to drive over with me and see the sport?" he asked her across the table.

"By no means," said the girl, with instant decision.

The unlucky youth, dimly perceiving that his effort had resulted only in a further recession into the slough of her disapproval, met this abrupt declination with tacit resignation sprung of a total inability to reply. He felt that persuasion would be futile. To conceal his chagrin and confusion, he blew a great cloud of tobacco smoke straight up into the air and sat watching it, his head thrown back.

"Never mind, Stuffy," said Mr. Brinton, consolingly. "I'll go with you myself."

"Thank you, sir," said the chunky young man, with real gratitude, which Miss Rawlins attributed to his anxiety to witness what she considered would undoubtedly be a most revolting spectacle.

"What do you say to doing some tennis later on?" Eliot Frame proposed to the younger Miss Rawlins. "Is the court any good?" he inquired of the commander.

"It's the best that money could make," answered his host, with a trace of indignation. "I ordered them to spare no expense."

"They probably carried out your orders to the letter," said Burgess, dryly.

"I guess it's good enough, then," said Frame, carelessly. "How about it, Pauline?"

The girl, who was fond of the game and who played strongly, accepted the proposal with pleasure.

"That will be fine," she said. "Who will play against us? Oliver, won't you and Alice take a challenge?"

"You can't have him," May Brinton interposed. "I reserve him for my personal use; he's going to take me to call on a friend of ours — a girl I used to go to school with."

"Is there another Allingwood girl here?" asked Charlotte Worthington. "Who is she?"

"Oh, she didn't enter until years after — that is, I think you left the school before she came," May corrected her reply. "Her name is Eleanor Hyde."

"Eleanor Hyde — Eleanor Hyde," said Miss Worthington, reflectively. She treated Allingwood as a link which bound her to girlhood; by interesting herself among the younger graduates of the institution, she could sometimes effect a momentary recedence into their social generation. "I don't know her, do I?" she inquired.

"No," said May, shortly.

And Burgess was glad to know that Miss Brinton intended to hold to the promise she had made him.

"I guess we'll have to wake up Vanderveer to make up our match," said Frame to Pauline Rawlins.

"I guess we will," his partner replied.

Meanwhile Mr. Brinton had conceived a plan. He addressed his daughter and Burgess.

"Why not both of you come with us?" he proposed. "We can stop and pick up Miss Hyde. The touring-car is plenty big enough for five."

His daughter looked at him with suspicion gnawing through to the surface.

"No, papa," she said mildly but firmly. "You and Stuffy can run along and look at your eels. Neither Oliver nor I care to see a lot of reptiles squirming in filth."

The commander accepted this decision resignedly, and the unhappy Smith, his round eyes winking behind his large nose, unconsciously compared himself to one of the uncomfortable, stranded denizens of the emptied pond.

Accordingly, shortly after breakfast the Rawlins sisters went to dress for tennis, Frame went to arouse the needed stockbroker, Mr. Brinton

and the yellow-haired Princetonian started for the garage where the flying squadron of motor cars which the capitalist maintained was anchored, and Miss Worthington was left to the matronly care of the colorless aunt, who presently descended the stairs. This programme was highly distasteful to Charlotte, but no one particularly cared what end her desires for entertainment met, and she was calmly disregarded in the calculations.

Burgess and May took a horse and runabout, and at half-past ten they set out for the Hyde farm.

Although Miss Brinton was quick to antagonize any girl upon whom she had reason to believe her father looked with especial favor, she had really anticipated with some little pleasure the thought of again meeting Eleanor Hyde. Her slight recollection of Eleanor was on the whole quite favorable; she remembered her as a slim, quiet girl with pretty eyes and gentle manners. It seemed very improbable that such a girl should have within a short year or two developed the characteristics of a calculating adventuress and in that rôle deliberately attempted the capture of an enormously opulent widower. But May guarded her father's single state with infinite caution; she saw a sinister purpose in every casual smile an

eligible lady bestowed upon Mr. Brinton; she read from each innocent pressure of a feminine hand in his a direct invitation to the altar; she was incessantly and almost insanely alert to ward off every slightest danger of this nature before it came to take threatening dimensions from its proximity or undisturbed continuance. She would have been honestly glad to disassociate this fear from the renewal of her acquaintance with Eleanor Hyde, but frankly she did not dare. Yet she was good-natured and generous, and she was perfectly ready to take her sometime schoolmate into her own set, but she candidly apprehended the effect upon the enthusiastic plutocrat of the beauty and grace and charm into which the girl had bid fair to bloom. In short, her inclinations lay toward carrying out the promise she had made Burgess; against this she retained her old doubts, but she conceded to Eleanor the benefit of them.

"You say she's grown pretty? I should scarcely know her," Miss Brinton interrogated of Burgess as they drove along.

"I thought so. And I believe I'm a very fair judge," her escort replied with a smile.

The verdict of this acknowledged expert did not wholly satisfy the young lady. She was less interested in the question of Miss Hyde's compara-

tive comeliness than in the matter of those who conceded or questioned it. Whether Eleanor was really beautiful was of less moment to Miss Brinton than whether certain persons believed her to be, and the depth of their various conclusions.

"What did papa think of her?" May pointedly inquired, looking straight ahead over the ears of the trotting cob.

Burgess knew the wily capitalist well enough to appreciate the justification for her questioning him, but he was careful not to prejudice the interests of Eleanor by telling the direct truth, so far as his opinion weighed. As a matter of fact he had thought Mr. Brinton to have been greatly taken with the country girl; but of course it would have been highly tactless to advance this conviction into the ears of the naturally suspicious daughter.

"Oh, your father seemed to like her well enough," he replied carelessly. He put forth a statement to divert her suspicions. "Her great hit was made, not with your father or me, but with Hamilton King."

"Is that so?" May responded. She was in a measure relieved. The disposition of the novelist's affections was of no moment to her. And she was glad, moreover, to know that the girl was

not suitorless. A popular young novelist ought to be a sufficient capture for any country maiden; certainly Eleanor was less apt to be discontented and consequently dangerous if an adequate knight was already filling the field out of which she desired to keep the opulent widower.

"Oh, yes," Burgess went on with assurance. "I was really surprised at Hamilton; I never saw him quite that way before. He seemed to think that Miss Hyde's eyes were several different and distinct shades in various lights and emotions. That's a bad sign."

"It would seem so, wouldn't it?" said the girl, with a light laugh. Evidently King would suffice as a stalwart defence if a defence was to be needed.

"And King came back here all alone; he was here that evening I asked you to take up Miss Hyde and help her out of the awkward position your father had put her into with the town people. King said that he had gone back to get material for a story."

"Perhaps it will be an autobiographical romance," said the girl, hopefully, and Burgess laughed at her use of the seven-syllabled word and the capping expression.

"I think she rather fancied King, too. He can

be very decent when he tries — and he tried," the young man asserted.

His companion was sincerely delighted over the mutuality of attraction. Her good humor increased as she neared the end of their journey. She was charmed with the wall and the little brook and the narrow lane between the gnarled apple trees, and with the old white house set against the shoulder of the hill. When the runabout drew up at the doorstep, she sprang out and ran up the steps with an eagerness which was not in the least simulated. Burgess sat holding the cob as she followed the hired girl and disappeared into the shadowy hallway. He took out his cigarette case, smiling a little.

IX

SOME one once said that Charlotte Worthington's gradual withdrawal from the lists of romantic possibilities reminded him of the slow, helpless agony of an expiring ox. Charlotte had been pushed down the primrose path, facing backward and bitterly contesting every step that marked the passage of another day. Still she kept hoping against hope and reluctantly regarded a future which constantly drew nearer inevitable singularity. The only man who had combined the notable courage and uncommon taste to ask her hand she had rejected through the urgent apprehension that he was desirous merely of her property. She was now nearing the point where she heartily congratulated herself on the possession of her fortune and secretly wondered whether some more or less eligible young man was not sufficiently mercenary to accept it and her together. Just at present no candidate seemed forward within reach, but the captivating Charlotte was ever alert. She lived on lean meat and hot

water, when at home, in the hope of reducing her awkward total of pounds avoirdupois; she went about with as many of the younger girls as would tolerate her, with a view to concealing her embarrassing total of years; and she kept in touch with certain phases of romance by studiously perusing somewhat scurrilous French novels and endeavoring to throw herself into the mental attitudes of their heroines.

When Mr. Brinton and Stuffy Smith had gone dashing out the driveway in an automobile, she had somewhat peevishly declined an invitation to referee the tennis match, and curtly refused to accompany Miss Wylie into the village. Miss Wylie was the maiden aunt who attempted in her colorless way to chaperon May Brinton and such of her guests as came under her direction; and Charlotte Worthington noted with spleen and alarm that the old maid was beginning to look upon her as a congenial fellow; wherefore Charlotte was consciously unhappy, when they were together, lest others, too, might come to associate their ages and their stations. And, moreover, as she had for some days been feeling ill, she sought out a comfortable corner of the big hall and sat down alone with a book.

In the village of Burnham the arrival of Mr.

Brinton had caused a great stir. As the new tenant of the biggest local estate he stalked into the distinction of being the most notable summer resident; and those who had not seen him desired to, and those who had felt the lucrative caress of his immediate presence during his brief former sojourn hoped magnificently from his stay of longer duration. The Methodist minister, optimistic Mr. Purvis, dreamed vague white dreams of a new church, a neat stone structure with a remarkably fine window commemorating the generosity of the wealthy New Yorker who had made the building possible; Riggs, the veterinary, foresaw that his professional services would be in great demand in Mr. Brinton's stable; the local butcher and baker and candlestick maker all of them anticipated incomes greatly augmented by the liberal patronage of a man who had the reputation of ordering in wholesale quantities and paying without protest; the social elements hoped from his display of democracy that they would receive an opportunity of tasting his hospitality; every one in Burnham had some motive in welcoming Mr. Brinton.

As Charlotte Worthington sat in the depths of a cushioned wicker chair reading *Tom Beauling*, she was aroused by the sound of steps softly pad-

ding through the hall; a shadow fell across the page, and she raised her eyes to perceive an enormous lady in a faded purple dress looking curiously down at her. The enormous lady smiled in a friendly manner, and drew nearer, wiping the beads of perspiration from her fat face with a ridiculously diminutive lace handkerchief.

"I couldn't seem to find the door-bell," said Mrs. Al Squires, with a painful disregard of veracity, "so I jest come right in 'nd reckoned I'd find some one before I went far. Are you Miss Brinton?"

Miss Worthington surveyed her colossal visitor, and her apprehension melted into covert amusement. She laid down her book, and rose.

"Miss Brinton is out," she said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Mrs. Squires gauged the stability of the settee beside her with one rapid glance. Then she sat deliberately down upon it. Her judgment was correct — it trembled but held firm.

"Oh, no — nothin' at all," she replied easily. "I s'pose I'd better tell you who I am, or you'll begin to think I'm tryin' to sell you somethin'. I'm Mrs. Al Squires, 'n' I jest dropped in to welcome you, thinkin' it only neighborly."

"I'm glad to see you," said her hostess-by-proxy.

"My name is Worthington — I'm stopping with the Brintons."

"I guess I'm about the first one to call," announced the visitor with a show of pride. She looked about as if she feared lest some rival for this distinction would start up out of the shadows from behind the curtains, and upset her claim to the distinction. "Never put off till afternoon what you c'n do 'n the mornin' — that's my motto," she asserted.

"It's a very good motto," Miss Worthington politely agreed. "Miss Brinton will be sorry to have missed seeing you," she added. "And her father, too," she put in as an afterthought. Truly Mrs. Squires was a sight that no person with the least sense of humor would be willing to forego.

The visitor puckered her fleshy lips in disappointment.

"Ain't Mr. Brinton home?" she said. "Say, I'm reel sorry not to see him again."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Brinton?" her hostess inquired.

"Oh, mercy, yes!" replied the huge lady in faded purple, with easy confidence, rocking gently to and fro. "When he was here before, I was down 'n' ate dinner on his private car."

"Really?" said Miss Worthington.

"Oh, we had a gay time!" continued Mrs. Squires. "There was Mr. Brinton 'n' Mr. Burgess 'n' Mr. King 'n' Eleanor Hyde 'n' me. I 'most got stuck in the door gettin' in. Yes, we had a fine time."

Miss Worthington reflected that her guest's physique must afford her liberal opportunities for this rather odd form of enjoyment. But she had heard familiar names.

"Eleanor Hyde? Is that the girl who used to go to school at Allingwood? Why, Miss Brinton and Mr. Burgess have gone out to call on her."

"Mr. Burgess? Is he here again? You don't say!" responded the stout lady, significantly.

The eager Charlotte was now on her favorite scent. It struck her that perhaps May was kindly advancing a love affair of Oliver's. She was immediately consumed with curiosity, and Mrs. Squires came temporarily into the direct line of a very rapid fire.

"Did Mr. Burgess seem to like Miss Hyde?" she asked, earnestly regarding the caller.

"Like her? Oh, I see what you're drivin' at. I guess they all liked her well enough, but Mr. Burgess warn't so bad 's the other two," replied her voluble visitor, little loath to this species of gossip.

"Wasn't he?" Miss Worthington poised.

"No. It seemed to me that Mr. King was pretty anxious to get on th' right side in a sort o' quiet way, but Mr. Brinton was reel funny; I had to laugh, thinkin' about it afterward."

Miss Worthington sank back in her chair in a silent ecstasy. This was better than she had hoped; instead of one man there were three who fell under her rapt gaze. Surely here was a romance come straight to her hand — three men of her acquaintance, all of them (so she assumed) in love with one lovely farm girl. The web of her imagination threw off in the choice of three separate happy endings to this local Maud Muller. In her mind the opulent widower became a sort of King Cophetua; she saw the tenor of King's work changed, and the thread of the dilettante existence of Burgess entirely broken by the chance encounter with the captivating country maid. She was satisfied.

The party collected about noon. Miss Wylie returned from her inspection of the town; the tennis-players, who had finished the match, were sitting on the piazza; Burgess and May Brinton had come back from their call on Eleanor Hyde; and finally Mr. Brinton and Stuffy Smith had darted into the grounds and up to the porte-cochère — in this case the porte-chauffeure.

"Did you see your eels? How were they?" Eliot Frame called out.

"Great!" said the chunky youth, with laconic enthusiasm, as he climbed down from the tonneau.

"They covered the whole lower end of the pond. You wouldn't have believed your eyes," said the capitalist, as he came up the steps.

"I know that *I* wouldn't," said Alice Rawlins, remembering sharply the discomfiture to which she had been brought by her former credulity, and Mr. Brinton laughed appreciatively.

"Did you find your friend at home?" the yellow-haired young man politely asked of his young hostess.

"Oh, yes," May answered. "And I tried very hard to get her to come back with me, but she couldn't come. Where's Charlotte?"

"She didn't feel well; she's up in her room, lying down. I telephoned for the doctor, and he's coming before luncheon," Miss Wylie stated.

The party mumbled appropriate condolences, although no one particularly cared.

"By the way," Miss Wylie went on, "we had a call from one of the Burnham ladies, a friend of yours, John; a Mrs. Squires — Mrs. Al Squires, I think she said."

"Woman built something like a canal-boat

standing on end — about the same size?" inquired the capitalist.

"Yes," responded his relative.

"Remarkable woman," said Mr. Brinton. "Weight simply enormous, and conversational output in direct ratio. I trust you all met her — I hope not a single one of you missed her. She's a character."

"They didn't meet her," said Miss Wylie; "no one was here except Charlotte Worthington and I. Charlotte seemed greatly interested in her; they were getting along splendidly when I arrived."

"Charlotte's probably going in for the village gossip," said Burgess, with a laugh. "A natural curiosity and a voluble manner of touching up a story that her neighbor has retailed to her, and that's our colossal friend. She's a perfect sprinkling cart of mild local scandal."

Stuffy Smith managed to draw Alice Rawlins aside and attempted to engage her in conversation. Stuffy uneasily felt that the Brinton house party had begun inauspiciously for him. Before he started, the indefinite desire to further himself in the favor of Miss Rawlins had swum hazily but largely on the surface of his rather shallow mind; but he seemed to have retrogressed rather than advanced since the departure from New York.

In his efforts to be a true cavalier he had achieved nothing but failure. While ascending the steps to the car he had stepped on the girl's skirt and torn it; in procuring for her a selection of reading matter, he had led the way with a novel over which the critics had wavered between condemning as inartistically suggestive or praising as courageously indecent. The chunky youth had known nothing of the book's reputation, and had been painfully surprised when Miss Rawlins rejected his gift with some indignation. Then he had fetched her a glass of water, and just as he was handing it to her, the train had lurched and he had spilled part of it over her frock and knocked her hat askew. He had subsequently bored her for a long half hour with a dissertation on the breeding of bull-dogs, a subject upon which he was really erudite but which possessed not an iota of interest to his auditor. To end this chain of infelicities he had alluded to a girl who was very quiet and unassuming, but of whom Miss Rawlins happened to be quite fond, as a potted palm. "Marion Ingalls — she's a potted palm." This was an expression of which Alice could not extract the complete significance, Smith smilingly declining to divulge its entire analyzed force, but she set it down as sneeringly deprecatory, and was

consequently offended. At the conclusion of the journey he had closed at the bottom of favor, and his well-intended invitation to Mr. Brinton's eel-exterminating carnival had begun the morning on the same low level. The pathos of his position lay in the fact that he deeply admired Miss Rawlins, and would have gone to almost any end to gain her approval. He seated himself at her feet near the end of the piazza, and his large, round, pale blue eyes regarded her with unexpired hope.

"Say, why are you angry at me?" he said in low, confidential tones, as though he were totally ignorant of a single item which might have carried on the account of his disfavor. "Honestly, I didn't know anything about that book; I never read these current novels," he added somewhat superfluously, since no one for an instant suspected him of reading anything at all.

"Oh, that's all right; I'm sure you didn't know about it," said the girl, a little more graciously, this concession arising from a sincere belief in his truthfulness. Not wholly blind to his intellectual deficiencies, the yellow-haired youth grasped this fact.

"You mean I'm not a reading man," he said. "Well, maybe I'm not," he confessed a little

morosely. The point did not seem to contain the elements for argument. "I admit I've got no taste that way—I read a fearful lot of stuff in college, but most of it bored me stiff. I thought Pius Æneas was a whimpering prig, and Odysseus was just a crazy hobo, and I don't see how they came to make a hobo the hero of a fairy story, anyway."

"I never thought of it exactly that way," said Miss Rawlins, with some interest.

"I took a course in Tennyson and Browning, too," the young man went on. "I didn't pretend to care anything about poetry, but I knew that the feller who gave the lectures had neuralgic headaches and used to cut recitations about half the time, and while I was there all the stuff went filtering through my head and some of it had to stick."

"Really?" said the girl, with amusement.

"And I went to three or four kinds of history. When I graduated I knew quite a lot about Cleopatra and Charlemagne and Aaron Burr and the Duke of Wellington and Boadicea and all that crowd. But you don't hear any one around town talking up any of 'em, so I gradually forgot what they all did."

"How unfortunate!" was Miss Rawlins's comment.

"Yes. After I got out of college, I intended to keep up my reading — I give you my word I did," said the young man, mournfully; "but I couldn't seem to get interested in anything. I tried to read a book called *The History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, and the first volume almost killed me."

"It doesn't sound quite your style," said the girl, kindly.

The chunky youth was much encouraged by the apparent melting of the ice in her manner toward him.

"Say," he proposed earnestly, "you've read a lot of things, and you know all the books a feller like me ought to read. Now, if you'll make out a list, I'll promise you to get 'em and read 'em. Only please leave out *The History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*. Yes, I'll promise you to get 'em and read 'em." He looked at the girl with uneasy anxiety.

"Oh, I couldn't think of assuming such a responsibility," said Miss Rawlins, hastily. She fancied Stuffy struggling desperately through Boswell's Life or painfully perusing Walter Pater. Yet surely it was a brave offer he was making. "But I congratulate you on your ambition," she added with a smile.

A shadow came over the blond features of her stocky companion.

"Oh, I haven't any ambition in that way," he protested. "Not a bit. But I'd just do it, though, if you'd like me to," he announced meaningly.

"Don't be foolish," Alice replied with decision.

At the other end of the piazza Eliot Frame had succeeded in getting Pauline Rawlins apart in a shady corner. For some months past Eliot had been noticeably attentive to the girl, who, while she never welcomed his presence, did not rebuff him with the vigor which her elder sister displayed in her treatment of the hapless Stuffy. For the question of Frame's availability was a more open one. Although he led a life more marked by its velocity than by an adherence to any narrowly conceived road of righteousness, he had his better side. He was a big, handsome young fellow of a recognized courage which his ability at polo gave him an opportunity to display; he had a dashing way of executing his desires, which was by no means unattractive to women; he was good-humored and obliging; and he possessed excellent prospects of some day inheriting a fortune sufficiently ample to gratify the most ardent spender. In fact he was typically one of the men upon whom Mrs. Rawlins had launched her daugh-

ters. And yet against these there were decided drawbacks to Eliot. He was somewhat arrogant and flamboyant and apparently quite useless, and he imbibed excessive quantities of strong drink at unhappily frequent intervals. If he married, he might be tractable and subject to reformation, or again, he might develop into a brutal inebriate with whom it would be impossible to live. It was a risk which Pauline had under careful consideration. One of Frame's good qualities was a frankness of contempt, which was evidenced in what he was saying.

"Charlotte Worthington sick?" he commented incredulously. "Don't you believe it for a minute! Don't squander a single sympathetic sob over Charlotte — she probably just wants to see whether the country doctor here can be fascinated."

"Oh, Eliot, what a horrid thing to say! She may be really ill," the girl replied, laughing a little.

"Well, I'm not going to waste any crocodile tears over her," Frame retorted. "You see, Pauline, this house party has paired off naturally, as all properly arranged house parties should. Ollie Burgess is taking care of May, and Stuffy Smith is supposed to be looking out for your sister, and there are you and I. Now Thatcher

Vanderveer was evidently asked up to trot around with Charlotte,—the Brintons must have something fearful against him,—and he didn't find it out until he started and couldn't back out. This morning, rather than get under the Juggernaut, he lies in bed and claims he's threatened with nervous prostration. Perhaps he really is; to come up here thinking he was on a pleasure trip and then suddenly discover what he was up against must have jarred his nerves considerably—it would have jarred mine, I know. Then Charlotte finds herself sidetracked, and starts on a still hunt for local talent, commencing with the doctor."

"Eliot, I think it's simply scandalous in you to talk this way," said Miss Rawlins, with dutiful reproachfulness. "I saw the doctor when he arrived, and he's an old man with gray whiskers."

"Then Charlotte will recover," responded her companion, promptly. "I'll bet three to one that those gray whiskers make a quick cure and she's down to lunch. What do you say?"

Pauline only laughed.

"I'm sorry the doctor can't qualify," said Frame, reflectively; "but if he's the man you saw, I guess those whiskers will put him out of the eligible list; he probably has a wife and an allopathic family, anyway, but I'm sorry he couldn't

have been a little more presentable. You see, that Worthington woman's a regular devil, Pauline, and if she has nothing to do, she mixes in every one else's business, and I'm afraid of her."

While Miss Wylie had accompanied the physician to the room of the patient over whose illness Eliot Frame had been so sceptical, Mr. Brinton had remained with his daughter and Burgess.

"By the way, May," exclaimed the capitalist, "I forgot to tell you that we're to have another guest."

"Who?" inquired the girl.

"Well, we stopped at the Inn on our way home — Stuffy and I, — and who do you suppose had just arrived?"

"I don't know," said his daughter.

"Hamilton King?" Burgess hazarded.

Mr. Brinton looked at him in surprise.

"Did you know he was coming?" he asked suspiciously.

"No," his guest answered. He glanced at the girl, and as their eyes met they both laughed.

"What's the joke?" inquired the magnate.

"Well, perhaps the young lady we've just seen had something to do with his return," May said. "But she didn't mention that she expected him, did she?" she asked her companion of the call.

Perhaps her school friend had affected an ingenuousness which had convinced without question, but which circumstantial facts would later undermine.

"I didn't hear her mention it," Burgess conceded. He himself began to evince dim suspicions.

"Is that so?" was Mr. Brinton's comment. He fell suddenly and remarkably silent. He was not at all certain that he approved of this affair between King and Eleanor Hyde going forward. But he took a fresh satisfaction in the innocent insistence with which he had dragged King away from the Inn. King had protested strongly against leaving his rented quarters, but the good-natured capitalist had simply declined to hear of his remaining at a hotel while in Burnham, and against the novelist's polite and probably sincere remonstrances he had made all arrangements for the transshipment of his belongings. He now reflected that this was quite as well; he would have the young man under his watchful and not always encouraging eye. Certainly King had lost a measure of independence on his quest.

"Well, how did you like Miss Hyde?" he asked carelessly of his daughter, for the moment forgetting that he had depicted the country girl as an intimate whom May could scarcely be expected now coolly to analyze.

May looked at the situation from another satisfactory viewpoint; in the arrival of King she saw the last element of threatening danger to her father eliminated.

"She's simply charming; I didn't appreciate her a bit at Allingwood," she said.

Her two hearers agreed perfectly with her in this enthusiastic estimate of Miss Hyde's attractions, although neither of them said so.

"I hope she'll come over here a lot this summer," said May.

This hope was silently shared by the gentlemen who attended her words with a taciturn approval which each endeavored to conceal.

"She's a perfect dear," Miss Brinton stated.

This last remark, laconic but embracing, seemed to the capitalist and his guest to hit the nail squarely on the head.

"I'm glad you like her," said Burgess. "You see I feel somewhat responsible for bringing you together again."

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you," May asserted.

The physician, whose gray whiskers Eliot Frame had predicted would effect an instant cure of his patient, came out, followed by Miss Wylie, and getting into his buggy, which a small

colored boy was holding, he drove away. Miss Wylie came up to Mr. Brinton.

"Well, what's the matter with her?" asked the capitalist, cheerfully.

The reply was quite unexpected.

"He says she's got the mumps."

Mr. Brinton looked surprised. Then he frowned slightly. His frown was succeeded by an expression of humorous reflection. Suddenly he burst into a loud laugh.

"The mumps, hey?" said he.

May Brinton, Burgess, Alice Rawlins, and Stuffy Smith, who had approached to learn the verdict of the man of medicine, and the lady who had communicated the distressing news, all looked at him in somewhat shocked astonishment; his attitude toward his stricken guest seemed inexplicably heartless. In the opinion of Alice Rawlins the amusement a man could derive from the announcement that a young lady visitor had fallen ill had best be concealed; she was unable to recognize the basis upon which her host's sense of humor was founded. But Mr. Brinton continued to laugh. The rest of the company began to divert their attention from him, and half-embarrassedly sought each other's eyes. Slowly and silently they commenced to

veer from first sympathy to the capitalist's point of view.

"The mumps! O Lord!" said Mr. Brinton, slapping his knee between his gasps. Pauline Rawlins and Eliot Frame came up, and their host turned to them. "Charlotte Worthington's got the mumps!" he announced, almost overcome with laughter.

Suddenly his viewpoint, even more contagious than the malady by which his guest had been attacked, seemed to penetrate simultaneously the whole group. Men and girls alike, even the staid Miss Wylie, the somewhat proper and conscientious Alice Rawlins, and the unresponsive Stuffy Smith, exploded in a shout of mirth.

"The mumps! O Lord!" said Mr. Brinton, wiping the tears from his eyes with a garish pocket handkerchief. Eliot Frame leaned helplessly against a pillar, collapsed with sheer amusement.

"I apologize," he managed to articulate to Pauline. "I did the lady a great injustice." And he exploded with renewed merriment.

Miss Wylie was first to recover her self-possession.

"I don't think you're very sympathetic," she remarked reproachfully.

Her reproof was greeted by merely another wild outburst of laughter. A grave servant came to say that luncheon was served.

"Poor Charlotte!" said Mr. Brinton, getting to his feet weak with mirth. "Come on — lunch. Poor Charlotte!"

X

WITH no perceptible friction Eleanor Hyde took her place in the Brinton set — as easily as if she had bought her way into it, position in that select circle being, indeed, usually gained by purchase, or, more strictly to speak, by the mere possession or display of the purchase price. But Eleanor was readily welcomed for her personal attractions, and her lack of fortune was no drawback to her advancement in the favor of these opulent people. For although they formed an aristocracy of wealth and were mostly concerned with those things which directly sprang from their affluence, such as gayety and luxury and indolence, in other ways they were entirely, even carelessly, democratic. No one of them had the least desire to probe into Miss Hyde's ancestry or the extent of her income; it was enough for them that she was a pretty and bright and graceful girl, and they were all of them wholly willing to be friendly with her.

Under these conditions the limited resources of Eleanor came in a way to be a positive advantage

to her. Wealth, except in simply stupendous quantities, could not have affected her standing in any particular with the men of the party. Frame and Smith and Vanderveer and Burgess were all of them proprietors either of independent fortunes or of ample expectations which shaded out from almost certain contingencies. The possession of money would not have helped Eleanor at all with any one of them; they accepted their own opulence quite as a matter of course and looked upon it as a mere convenience to which they had been accustomed as long as they could remember; and they regarded the lack of equal material fortune in others with the same casual composure. Dollars, except in enormous numbers, they considered to be articles strictly of use and not of reckoning, and Eleanor would have had to struggle against the most abject and outwardly evident poverty, or else to roll in a multitude of millions, in order to have attracted their attention to her financial station at all.

With the women her isolation from the plutocracy was a real advantage. All women (and especially those of like ages) regard each other as possible rivals, and those of the Brintons' set seemed to consider their wealth to be a sort of helpful armament, the lack of which upon Eleanor

they felt bound to recognize by a display of additional courtesy toward her. They were not in the least patronizing, but they could not prevent — and they did not try to prevent — their gowns and their manners and their conversation from savoring of no inconsiderable money output. When Miss Hyde wore a white dress, the men, with a single composite thought to the general effect of girl and raiment, would doubtless have advanced the unanimous opinion that it was a pretty dress and that the single blue cornflower in the belt added greatly to its effectiveness. If closely interrogated, they would very likely have united in hazarding the belief that it was constructed of inexpensive material and — this very vaguely — that they had seen it before. The women, on the other hand, could have closely estimated the very modest number of dollars which it had cost and the sum total of times it had done service in their presence; but they were sufficiently well bred not to give either to Miss Hyde or to one another or to an outsider the slightest indication that they had observed the frock at all.

It could not be gainsaid, however, that Eleanor progressed less rapidly into their favor than into that of the men. May Brinton was generally consistent in her friendship, but she suffered slight

sporadic returns of her first suspicion and jealousy. Charlotte Worthington begrudged and envied the girl her youth and prettiness and charm, although she was far too diplomatic to let her secret resentment be known. The two Rawlins girls had the naïve Knickerbocker surprise, not to be overcome in an instant, that anything really good could be found outside Manhattan, and it took them some time to settle down into the concession and conclusion of Miss Hyde's desirability. Miss Wylie, the colorless chaperon, regarded her in a sort of reserved approval which broke no ice toward intimacy.

Eleanor was much more warmly received by the members of the opposite sex. Eliot Frame was too frank to conceal the fact that he considered her uncommonly attractive, even though his admiration ran the risk of offending Pauline Rawlins, — a very slight risk, because Pauline was sufficiently broad-minded to like his sincerity and finally to coincide in his taste. Stuffy Smith took an opposite course for caution, and made a quite futile attempt to hide an opinion similar to Frame's; and Alice Rawlins, who was clever enough to perceive his tactfully intended hypocrisy, held him in a little additional contempt because of it. Vanderveer, the nerve-shattered stockbroker, was

pleasantly disposed toward Miss Hyde, but took no opportunity to advance very far into her acquaintance; he spent most of the time lying in a hammock perusing huge quantities of daily papers, which lay about him in dishevelled piles. His actions — or rather his inaction — somewhat irritated May Brinton, who disapproved of what she considered to be his unnecessary display of indifference. Miss Brinton stated to her father — and with some heat — that Vanderveer had accepted an invitation to what he knew was a house party, and since his arrival had conducted himself as though he were stopping at a sanitarium. So long as Charlotte Worthington was confined to her room with the mumps, his attitude was of positive benefit to the balance of the company; but after she reappeared upon the scenes, his unwillingness to be in the least companionable resulted in the duplication of an odd number and was a considerable drawback to the poise of their plans.

Miss Worthington's recovery was rapid. No one particularly cared whether it was speedy or slow, with the exception of the gray-whiskered doctor with the allopathic family, who would have liked to prolong the remunerative convalescence as far as possible. But Charlotte with her cus-

tomary unconscious lack of tact was quickly up and about again, fully recovered and alert to every chance for mischief of her favorite sorts.

The attitudes of Frame and Stuffy Smith and Vanderveer toward Eleanor have been briefly touched upon. The attitudes of King and Burgess and Mr. Brinton it is almost unnecessary to discuss. Burgess was inclined to stand out of the way. He liked the girl well enough, but he quickly perceived that King's liking for her was of a deeper, stronger, and more serious sort; and so he retired to the society of the complaisant May. As for King, his partiality for Miss Hyde soon became a matter of common comment. He frequently annexed her for long drives in one or another of Mr. Brinton's runabouts. Mr. Brinton himself scorned to use such simple, inconspicuous vehicles, but he maintained them for the benefit of his guests, while he himself dashed recklessly about in his various touring-cars. He was constantly inviting parties to accompany him on cyclonic runs, but his willingness to travel at less than two or three times the rate of speed ordinarily adjudged to be safe on the rough roads of the countryside made his excursions somewhat unpopular. Much to his disappointment, those he sought as guests often timidly advanced strange protests and bashfully

but firmly declined to risk their lives on his pleasure trips. His initial spin with Vanderveer almost resulted in a relapse on the part of the nerve-strung stockbroker, who subsequently stated from the vantage of a hammock that one afternoon with Mr. Brinton was a qualified deal worse than any three panics he had ever been through on the floor of the exchange. The capitalist's clientèle of voluntary guests gradually dwindled, and finally he was reduced to picking up natives of the town and carrying them off through the country at fearful speed. The natives were invariably terrified and clung aghast to the sides of the car as it ate its way up crooked, rocky hills, and slammed down appalling slopes with frightful velocity. They would limply descend to the ground at their journey's end with heartfelt relief, and spend the next few days in bragging to their friends and neighbors over their exploit; and indeed there was little need or chance for artificial illumination in the recounting of their narratives. Among the Methodists, where the capitalist's chief acquaintance lay, automobiling with Mr. Brinton became a most popular diversion, although only the most venturesome or those whose minds were calmly set upon a higher life dared trust themselves in his extraordinary hands.

It was certainly a fine form of excitement which he led into many otherwise uneventful lives. One of his most loyal followers on his breakneck tours was enormous Mrs. Al Squires, who always wore a drab mackintosh and carried smelling-salts. Her fidelity and confidence were rewarded by frequent invitations from the magnate, although he covertly confessed that the springs usually had to be thoroughly overhauled after every trip on which she occupied the tonneau, and that the general structural strain on his machines from her weight was something too distressing to contemplate.

But while Mr. Brinton was pursuing his perilous way without mishap, the same fortune was not attending the affairs of Stuffy Smith — poor Stuffy, so anxious to please and so rarely pleasing, always falling under the wheels of the very cars which bore his opportunities, rising up disheartenedly after one defeat only to plunge headlong into another. This time he had been so indiscreet as to form a slow but a very decided desire to marry Alice Rawlins, which, in a person of a superior intelligence, would have been termed falling in love. Yet love seemed scarcely a suitable word to apply to the emotions of Sturtevant, with his air of painful embarrassment, his yellowish hair and prominent nose, his large, pale blue eyes always seeking

with shifty uneasiness some narrow avenue of escape, and his complete deficiency in humor, sympathy, erudition, imagination, and tact. And yet better things might have been expected of him, for he came of pleasant stock. His father was the czar of a flourishing monopoly, and one of his uncles, whose tastes ran to politics, had contributed a large sum to his party's campaign fund, and upon the party's quite unexpected success in the ensuing elections had been made minister to a small, remote, and unimportant state, where each year he was called upon to spend several times his salary in the entertainment of impecunious and often insistent fellow-countrymen, some of whom he was obliged to send back to America at his own expense. As for Stuffy, he did nothing except enjoy himself, and succeeded only infrequently in that.

One of the most attractive qualities in the yellow-haired youth was his complete lack of conceit. To be sure he had no especial reasons for self-congratulation, but conceit does not always follow along the lines of reason, and he might easily have believed himself to be of far more merit than was actually the case. His own estimate, which was based on a total absence of confidence, narrowly approximated the feelings of his wide acquaintance,

and indeed it was a fact that he had been brow-beaten into a thorough belief in his utter impossibility by the strong and united opinion of his friends and relatives to that effect.

Stuffy's attitude toward Alice Rawlins was characteristic. In one of the peculiar ramifications of his soggy mentality he had burst through to a clear conclusion that he greatly wished to marry the girl. Exactly why, he could not have told, for he reasoned along a single dimension, but the point of his desire was definite enough. Long since he had given Alice to understand his laborious and overwhelming anxiety to please her. Her rooms had been suffused with his flowers, which she time and again had urgently besought him to desist from sending her; he had persisted in inviting her to every conceivable form of entertainment and had been infrequently rewarded by an acceptance; he made calls, long, tedious, numerous, which the reluctant object of his affections tolerated because she could think of no plausible reason for terminating them; in a word he was a thorough and painstaking suitor of the very deadliest type.

All this time Miss Rawlins had given him not the slightest encouragement, Stuffy gloomily conceded. She had taken his lesser gifts under protest and had flatly rejected his major ones. She

had accepted his invitations grudgingly, and she had often denied him her presence, when any master mathematician tolerably adept in putting two and two together would have concluded that she merely did not care to be seen. But Smith fortified himself at heart against all these repulses in a single way. He clung to the positively brilliant theory that even if Miss Rawlins liked him, she was too proud a girl to let for an instant her maidenly feelings be shown to the world. In which he included himself. So he took refuge from his palpable rebuffs in the slight chance that she was playing a part and that she was unwilling to display what she really felt toward him. Smith's subtle argument was this — that even if she liked him well enough to make possible that which he desired, he was not clever enough to discover it except by the most direct methods. He therefore determined to make trial of these at the earliest possible moment, and awaited a propitious opportunity.

The opportunity seemed to have come one evening shortly after dinner. The Brintons and their guests had been sitting about, taking their coffee on the piazza. Four of them were making up a game of cards. The moon was just beginning to rise clear and yellow over the top of a long,

straight ridge, when Sturtevant suggested to Alice that they go down into the orchard and watch it rise. This was a rather surprising proposal for him to make, because no one supposed that he regarded the moon as in any way decorative, but every one rather assumed that he viewed it as a weak but useful light whose benefits he accepted off-hand and whose permanent eclipse or total loss he would have endured with perfect equanimity. Of its romantic properties he would have admitted he had not the slightest notion, but he had heard or somewhere read that the orb exercised a considerable influence in romantic directions upon young ladies as a whole, and he was glad to accept the chance of its assistance in the case on hand. As for Alice, she accepted his proposal to go into the orchard because she herself held a reasonable appreciation of beauty, and because she was good-humoredly willing to encourage Stuffy into a more intelligent liking for such objects as moons and stars and sunsets and clouds and flowers. It did not occur to her that his liking for anything at all would overbalance his inertia of diffidence and carry him off to distances of perplexity. But almost instantly she saw that she had miscalculated.

There was a rail fence at the end of the orchard,

and the yellow-haired youth leaned against it, nervously filling a pipe. It was a crisis in his life, and he attacked the subject uppermost in his mind without giving any introductory warning.

"Say, Alice," he said in a low voice, "I want you to marry me." Then he stopped short, overcome by the sheer realization of his burst of temerity and presumption. Not daring so much as to glance at his companion, he lit his pipe, striking three matches tremulously.

The girl's first impulse was to turn around and walk back to the house, leaving him standing there. Her second was to voice a decided and a rather indignant declination. Then it chanced that for just an instant her eyes fell on Smith, a figure almost pathetic in his helplessness and nearly ridiculous in his blind sincerity. In his embarrassment he stood leaning uneasily against the fence and waiting — waiting with a dumb impotency against events for the blow to fall. Miss Rawlins checked her inclination to go away, and her anger softened into mere annoyance; for no matter how impossible a man may be, his true desire of a girl will excuse very many things in her eyes, and Alice was convinced that the unhappy Stuffy was absolutely sincere. All his actions had been consistent, and he was far too stupid for pretence or to carry

"'SAY, ALICE, . . . I WANT YOU TO MARRY ME.'"

out for long a manufactured part with any degree of success.

"Say, Alice, I want you to marry me," he repeated, taking his pipe out of his mouth and staring blankly through the low branches of the apple trees that cut the climbing moon.

"I'm very sorry, Stuffy. But I can't," said the girl, and there was a curious mixture of curtness in her words and softness in her voice.

"Why not?" asked her companion, persisting.

Miss Rawlins hesitated. It seemed a trifle brutal to tell him the entire truth and inform him that she would not for an instant consider marrying him, even if all the remaining males of the whole human race should be suddenly extinguished at a single stroke. She thought of saying to him that she did not care for him in the way he ought to be cared for, but she caught herself wondering what way that could possibly be; she could no more imagine any one else falling in love with Stuffy than she herself could have performed this emotional trick to his benefit. She said the same words over again.

"I'm very sorry. But I can't."

A cloud of smoke shot out from under the young man's prominent nose up into the moonlight.

"Say, I'm afraid I don't say it the right way,"

he remarked discouragedly. "I never asked a girl before to marry me," he explained.

Judging from the amateurish and thoroughly bungling manner in which he was conducting the present proposal, the girl in question was quite ready to accept this statement as true. It was incredible that any experience at all in previous similar affairs could have been of so little benefit to the man under fire. At the very least his declaration was highly plausible.

"I believe you," said Miss Rawlins, with gravity. "But I can't marry you, Stuffy — really," she hastened to add.

The large pale blue eyes of the chunky youth wandered dejectedly over the ground. He did not move a muscle.

"Don't you think you might — some other time?" he ventured into a future refuge.

At the awkward way in which the yellow-haired one had sought permission to renew his suit at a subsequent date the girl found it difficult to repress a smile. In fact Sturtevant's whole campaign had been so respectful and colorless and unimaginative and generally incorrect and dull as to be somewhat absurd.

"I know I'm not much use — people think I'm a regular dub — but it isn't all my fault," he con-

tinued. "I can't offer you much except everything I've got — and myself — and that isn't much," he said pleadingly, with slight ambiguity as to what item his last deprecatory statement should apply.

"That's all any man can offer a girl," Alice acknowledged politely. She did not add that in the present case it was not nearly enough. Whatever the extent of Stuffy's present or prospective fortune, he himself could not be considered an accompanying asset worthy of serious consideration. Yet his feeling for her, dull as it was, she knew to be genuine, and upon this account she forgave him much and felt a real regret that he had gone so far.

"I'm sorry — but it's simply out of the question," she said, as kindly as she knew how, and she began to walk back toward the house, the rejected and dejected Smith following mournfully after her, mute and unprotesting.

Down at the end of the garden, variations on the same motive were being played by Pauline Rawlins and Eliot Frame.

Frame had led rather a scarlet life. His career at Harvard had been marked by more eccentricities of conduct than distinctions in study, his most notable exploit having been a repetition of Paul

Revere's ride which began with tremendous success, all the sleeping farmers along the road being aroused from their beds by the announcement that the British were coming, but which ended in Eliot's passing a part of the night in the inglorious confines of the Lexington lockup. After graduation he had transferred his existence to another stage without lessening in the least its velocity. He rode hard, and he drank hard, and sometimes he worked hard, and he lived hard — all of them very sporadically. Recently he had become exceedingly tired of the set in which he had raced through recent years, and he unconsciously longed for a change. He was wearier than he well knew of roulette wheels and horse-races and habitually unchaperoned young women with dangerously décolleté gowns and fluffy hair, who smoked cigarettes and discussed delicate questions with astonishing informality. His male friends, most of whom were drunk in various degrees and disorderly in diverse and often quite ingenious ways at frequent intervals, no longer amused and interested him as of old. In this state of mind it was quite natural that he should turn to the acquaintance of a girl who had been raised in the most rigid and rigorous orthodoxy of blue blood, who swayed toward the properly conservative without nearing the prudish,

who was clean-minded and wholesomely clever and good-looking in a clear, quiet way. Such a girl was Pauline Rawlins.

She, on her side, had good reason to fancy Eliot. He was big and handsome and eminently a man of the world she had as yet little viewed. She liked the dash with which he did things, — and he did many things in excellent form, — and she admired him for his strength and enthusiasm and generosity, although all these excellent qualities were too frequently misdirected and badly used by their careless possessor.

The same yellow moon, which had come up over the ridge to witness the scarcely contested discomfiture of the unlucky Stuffy, was shining brightly through the garden. There was a soft touch of warm evening breeze and a faint scent of roses. Back through the trees the lights of the house were dimly visible, and the sound of a banjo energetically strummed came out on the night. The man and the girl stood listening, and then Frame spoke.

"Well, this is my last evening with you — for a while, at least," he said regretfully.

"You really have to go back?" Pauline asked.

"Yes. There are about forty things I've got to do, and I've made positive engagements to do them all. You see the things I've got to do are the only

things I ever do at all; the things I merely ought to do I just let slide."

"I'm sorry you have to go," the girl said.

The big young man looked quickly down at her, and the light that lay in the depths of his eyes leaped to the surface.

"Do you really mean that, Pauline?" he said.

There was a queer, tense ring in his voice, which predicted to his companion the approach of the evitable.

"Why, of course," she answered with an odd mixture of steadiness, hesitation, and reluctance.

"How sorry are you?" Frame asked earnestly.

"Why, I don't know," the girl answered. She gave an uneasy little laugh, and she was thinking very fast, for she had not determined whether to accept this suitor or to reject him. "I don't know how to measure it. But I'm sorry — it's been very pleasant here."

"I asked you because it means a great deal to me — more than anything else there is," the man went on swiftly. He came over and put his hand on her shoulder. "Because if you're sorry I'm leaving, that's all I want — because I never want to leave you."

"Oh!" said the girl. She shrank a little under the touch of his hand, but she did not go away.

"Because I love you," said Eliot Frame.

"Oh!" said Pauline again, and there fell a silence between them.

"I love you more than anything in the world," the man went on. "And I'm almost afraid to tell you so; it sounds like a — like a sort of sacrilege. And I don't know what I can give you — but I'll try to give you all the best that I know how. I'm afraid it isn't very good; I've been a pretty bad sort, Pauline — I've done a great many things I shouldn't have done, and as soon as I began to know you I was sorry I had done them, but — well, perhaps, you can understand."

"Yes. I think that I can understand," Pauline said slowly — rather softly. She never quite understood before; sometimes she had shrunk from Frame in very fear, but now she was really touched and carried away by the sincerity of his desire of her.

"Pauline," said the man, half appealingly.

She dared one glance at him as he stood awaiting his fate in her reply; it was enough — he saw the look in her eyes, and masterfully, almost roughly, he caught her in his strong arms.

"My darling!" he said passionately, and the girl surrendered.

Next morning when Eliot Frame was forced to go down to the city on urgent business, he was somewhat unexpectedly accompanied by Sturtevant Smith.

XI

GRADUALLY the guests at the Brinton house drifted away, and as much tranquillity as could ever be found where Mr. Brinton disported himself again reigned over his portion of the village of Burnham. Of all the visitors one remained; Hamilton King, who had concluded his story of *Harmony Dale*, had no especial reason to return to the city, and found his surroundings completely satisfactory.

To May Brinton he was a very welcome guest. Her energetic father's flying fancies always alarmed her; she saw from the first a romantic menace in the proximity of pretty Eleanor Hyde, and the balancing presence of the attractive young novelist made toward Mr. Brinton's repression in this quarter. May had seen enough to justify her assumption that King's attentions to Eleanor were based on a more than casual liking for her, and under the circumstances she would have been glad to see the affair take a smooth channel and arrive at a logical conclusion. King would make a brilliant

match for the attractive country girl. But to Miss Brinton's uneasiness there were unmistakable counter-attentions toward Eleanor, and they issued from her inscrutable and irresponsible father; for unless the capitalist was endeavoring to prove himself a most thorough hypocrite, it was fairly clear that he must be counted among the admirers of the brown-eyed New England maiden. Just how far his admiration would carry him his daughter had no means of reckoning, but she was ready to welcome all desirable competitors who sought to take up the fight against him to gain the first place in the good graces of the sometime Allingwood girl. So she made the Brinton house as agreeable as possible for King, and every inducement which she could command she exercised toward the purpose of persuading him to continue his visit.

She could command many and forceful inducements. The novelist had been reared in a very fair degree of comfort, but never before had he lived the life of the luxury that pays and questions not. The Brintons' house ran like clockwork — like exceedingly expensive and elaborate clockwork. Every slightest wish or want seemed instantly and automatically gratified. Servants moved noiselessly about, executing King's spoken

desires and even anticipating correctly what they would be, for which latter talent they received large wages. Whatever he felt disposed to do, the implements suitable to it were immediately placed at his disposal; books and horses and iced beverages and golf clubs were ready to his service at a tap or a look. The dishes set before him at meals such as he had never tasted, constructed by a chef of both imagination and skill, defied his guessed analysis but contributed greatly to his satisfaction. In the very companionship of those near him King found himself equally fortunate; when he was in a companionable humor, May — and sometimes she brought it about that Eleanor came in her place — seemed almost miraculously to appear and bear him pleasant company; when he fell into a mood where he would be let alone, remarkably enough the whole house apparently respected his silent wish for solitude. In this time Miss Brinton showed that she possessed to a high degree a quality which she certainly could not have inherited from her father, — the quality of tact. If her tact were a quality inherited at all, the late Mrs. Brinton must have been a paragon of social diplomacy.

But there was one influence which was slowly working upon May to divert her from the course

she had planned and was cleverly pursuing. It was a large influence, and it was this. The longer Hamilton King remained at Burnham the more she felt herself dangerously attracted to him. Very gradually and in a transition which she herself scarcely realized, she commenced to look upon him not only as an excellent check to the possibly planned indiscretions of her father, but as exceedingly welcome upon his own account, and under these circumstances she began to verge into a feeling of jealousy toward Eleanor because of the evident esteem in which that young lady was held by the novelist. It did not seem quite fair for Miss Hyde to monopolize the admiration of so desirable a man. May was a very proud girl — far too proud to acknowledge even to her own heart that she could compete for a man's favor, but under the smooth surface she was annoyed over the progress King seemed quietly to be making. However, she consoled herself with the reflection that his advance was steadily adding to her father's security.

As a matter of fact Mr. Brinton should logically have been in less danger than she supposed him to be. Eleanor, with her brown eyes and her quiet, graceful ways, had made a strong impression upon him; but, to speak frankly, her type was far

above his grosser powers of appreciation. Briefly, Miss Hyde appeared to best advantage in some very simple white gown with two or three red roses at her waist or in her smooth brown hair; the capitalist preferred women who could stand strong colors and rich fabrics and heavy lace in large quantities, who had the assumption and confidence of experience, and who shone as sturdy, handsome backgrounds against which diamond sunbursts might be effectively set. He customarily chose knowledge before simplicity, dignity before grace, majesty before charm. In sight of these preferences Eleanor was perfectly safe, for it was highly unlikely that Mr. Brinton would meditate bestowing his tempered affections upon a young girl who differed so far from the standards of his previous taste, especially in consideration of the fact that he had for so many years remained immune to the straight-shot glances of dozens of eligible women of his favorite type. But his daughter did not reason thus clearly.

Little by little Miss Brinton relaxed her filial watchfulness as her attention was more and more drawn to King. She managed to be more frequently in his company, and his small courtesies she accepted with avidity, where formerly she had passed them easily by. The novelist came to dis-

cover that his opportunities to enjoy singly the society of Eleanor were being gently and gradually checked. Trifling inconveniences to their excursions and meetings kept presenting themselves; petty interruptions were constantly coming forward. Without perceiving by whose hand it was being done, his attention was awakened to feel the silken cord slowly tighten upon his impulses. The end of the empty piazza and the full moon were no longer for him and Eleanor alone.

At about this time enterprising Mrs. Al Squires determined to assist the slowly accumulating fund for erecting a new parsonage and to give it a sharp upward turn through the medium of a benefit entertainment. To this end she went to call for advice upon Mr. Brinton, who, by his activity at the spring fair, had inadvertently for him come to be regarded by the Methodists as their chief local benefactor. She was in grave doubt as to what form her projected entertainment should take. Of course another similar fair could easily be organized, and if Mr. Brinton's good nature held out to a repetition of his tactics of wholesale and indiscriminating purchase which he had displayed on the previous occasion, it would be a pleasing and profitable venture; but she was

somewhat apprehensive lest to such an affair the capitalist would forcibly donate the remarkable collection of articles which he had been induced to buy on his first evening in the village, and decline to buy them over again at exorbitant prices. This possibility was too awkward to contemplate, and Mrs. Squires rather reluctantly sacrificed her idea of another fair.

"I s'pose we might give some kind of a show. Oh, if we only had your colored men!" said the stout lady, reflecting upon the instant popularity they had achieved.

The capitalist caught the idea with enthusiasm.

"The very ticket! A variety show! I'll bring 'em up for it," he said.

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed his friend, clasping her fat hands together in joy and smiling a corpulent smile of adipose gratitude at the magnate.

"You just bet I will," replied Mr. Brinton, earnestly. "Now, what have you got here in the way of local talent?"

Frankly, local talent was neither numerous nor of a very high order of merit in Burnham, for it had had scant chance for development. The entertainments of recent date had been for the most part made up of underdone lyrical or overdone oratorical selections. Young ladies whose

voices showed traces of incorrect cultivation sang long, badly chosen songs, following falteringly insecure accompaniments, or else they delivered themselves in acid tones of recitations which were always steeped in cheapest pathos or morbidly melodramatic. Once in a while those busy souls who directed the church organization flung all the performers together in a laborious and lugubrious cantata, stuffed with stupid songs about bees and birds and flowers, and teeming with tiresome, tuneless recitatives in which the artists made conscientious but frequently unsuccessful efforts to effect a final connection with the keys on which they had originally started. All in all, local talent could scarcely be said to promise a very dazzling success.

Mr. Brinton considered them as a whole and as integral performers, and his verdict retired them to the wings.

"They're all right, but they lack novelty," he stated to Mrs. Squires. "You've heard the whole string of them dozens of times. What we want is something new — something that people will be glad to dig up their coin to see. Now maybe we'll be able to use your friends as a hidden chorus or something of that sort, but as stars they can't quite qualify. But you leave it all to me,

and I'll deliver the goods all right; I'll get you up a show that'll make your dead deacons hop up into the front seats."

Mrs. Squires was firmly of the belief that if any one was capable of performing this miracle, John S. Brinton was surely the man; in fact she was rather nervous lest he overexert his capabilities.

Mr. Brinton caught up the matter of the entertainment with rebounding enthusiasm, because he had been somewhat depressed over the downfall of Stuffy Smith at the hands of Alice Rawlins. He had no deep affection for the chunky youth, and he conceded Miss Rawlins's privilege to dispose of his suit as she saw fit, but he was sorry that the affair had culminated under his hospitable roof, — in much the same way he regretted Charlotte Worthington's attack of mumps; he felt a measure of responsibility for his enjoyment while he was a guest at the Brinton house, and it was tolerably evident that the yellow-haired young man's visit to Burnham had not been capped by any keen delight. The real pleasure Sturtevant had taken in automobile dashes and the eel-exterminating spectacle and a few other toward incidents could scarcely have compensated him for his rejection by the girl he desired to wed.

The rest of the party felt no great sympathy for poor Stuffy. May Brinton, with latent irritation for another reason, laughed at his pathetic discomfiture. Charlotte Worthington was annoyed that he had preferred the penniless Alice Rawlins to herself. Miss Wylie took a mere coldly impartial notice of him. Eleanor Hyde knew him hardly at all. King and Burgess and Thatcher Vanderveer all cordially disliked him. Pauline Rawlins was generally thought to applaud her sister's judgment, and Eliot Frame, who could afford to be magnanimous and who usually was, treated him with a sort of contemptuous pity. So Stuffy went back to the city and for the moment sank from sight because he found no sympathy from those he knew best.

Meanwhile the situation at Burnham was growing tenser. King was beginning to grow restive under May Brinton's diplomatic restraint. Mr. Brinton seemed to find new attractions in Eleanor. May was slowly withdrawing the first stock of affection which she had expended upon the New England girl, and this affection, which she would gladly have changed to a form suitable to the opposite sex and given back to the novelist, was now a worrying mass upon her heart and soul. She assumed toward her father and toward her school

friend a petulance which neither of them could analyze. They could not see why May was fortifying a position which implied an antagonism to them both. Eleanor at times suspected that May was angry with her, but in the consciousness of innocence she did not reason why, nor did she mention the subject of her friend's increasing coolness.

To make matters worse, Eleanor went driving with King one day, the horse bolted at sight of a road engine, and they both of them were thrown out. This incident annoyed May exceedingly. No one was hurt, and the damage done was trifling, but the very mischance furnished an additional bond of friendly sympathy between the two, which she greatly grudged. She would have much preferred to have herself been thrown out, and she suspected strongly that if King had been devoting a proper proportion of his attention to the horse, the runaway might easily have been averted. This incident happened shortly before the much heralded variety show.

For this occasion Mr. Brinton had gone beyond the church and hired the new town hall. This was a large, unsightly, modern, oblong structure which stood on the main street in the centre of the village. It was painted an offensive cream-

color, and light green blinds covered its long, gaping gashes of windows. Upon it was a high, bare, shingled roof that sloped to a central peak, and in front of its wooden steps was a square stone horse block. In this building town-meetings were held, in which inexpert speakers advocated or opposed the advisability of macadamizing the main street, and passed the schoolteachers' expense accounts; here political speakers alternately wept and bellowed, pointed with pride and viewed with alarm, and itinerant theatrical troupes occasionally spent a usually profitless evening.

The day of the Brinton vaudeville came at last. The performers, whom the capitalist had personally engaged in New York, arrived on the afternoon train and created much comment. They were indeed a throng of haughty souls, and after registering at the Inn, the most of them swaggered carelessly about town, staring sneeringly into the sky, regarding the provincial shop windows with supercilious scorn, and passing the interested and impressed villagers with never a look. The Montague Sisters — Flora and Félice — commanded the most attention because of their fashionable clothes and complexions. They wore enormous picture hats and cascaded bewitching smiles with lavish impartiality upon the ambient air. They

were accompanied upon their tour by Joe Kelly and McGuire Tim, who later in the evening in their knockabout sketch entitled — but this is to anticipate. Mr. Brinton himself appeared, escorting a thick-set, thuggish-looking person, whom he generously introduced to his large acquaintance as Laurence, the Paper Hanger. "Just wait till you see him to-night," he remarked knowingly to every one, for Mr. Brinton was alert to the possibilities in proper advertising. The Swiss Bell Ringers promptly sought out the café of the Inn, where they sat stolidly consuming astonishing quantities of whiskey-and-water. Professor Vincent busied himself completing the preparations for the care of his trained swans. Several of the party sauntered into the town hall, which was being cleaned, and made critical inspections of its stage. The good people of Burnham crowded the sidewalks of the main street, and the Methodists held their heads especially high with a certain pride of possession in the professor and the Montague Sisters — Flora and Félice — and Laurence, the Paper Hanger, and all the rest.

Sunset had hardly fallen, when directly after supper the ticket-office in the town hall opened, and those of lesser wealth commenced to filter

through the doors. Most of the floor had been reserved, but the rear portion and all the overhanging balcony were open to first comers. These spaces were rapidly filled by a set of men who wore blue flannel shirts, chewed tobacco, and laughed noisily over the crudest attempts at wit on the part of any one of their number. Presently the janitor of the hall appeared, lighting the lamps; he was warmly applauded by the gallery, and this created much amusement.

Then the main body of the house began to arrive, singly, in pairs, and in groups, fumbling for their pink tickets. There were young men in shiny, black serge cutaways, red neckties, and much-brushed hair, escorting bashful young ladies; family parties which included timid little girls with spindly legs incased in white stockings; summer residents, the men in dinner coats and the women in complicated cloaks which they spread over the backs of their seats, — these summer residents gave the impression of good-natured tolerance with the whole affair. The Methodist minister and his wife came in, she leading by the hand their little boy, who was dressed in black velveteen knickerbockers and a broad, flat, white collar, with a big, soft bow tie of magenta silk; they took their seats, the minister bowing gravely

and his wife pleasantly to various acquaintances. The greatest sensation was caused by the arrival of Mr. Brinton's own party, and the gallery craned its neck to see. The commander, in full dress and bearing his tall silk hat magnificently, led his contingent up the aisle, nodding right and left, and smiling with important anticipation. There were, besides himself, Miss Wylie, the colorless chaperon, May Brinton, Eleanor Hyde, and Hamilton King. Mr. Brinton, with customary liberality, had purchased an entire row of seats, and upon some of the unoccupied ones the members of the party piled their various wraps and hats. The orchestra, which, as well as the performers, had been brought from the city, commenced to collect, uncasing and adjusting and tuning their instruments, laughing and talking together in German. The oboe player had a great joke upon the second violin — there could be no doubt of that; he explained it to the sad-looking little cellist, who smiled wanly, drawing his bow softly over the strings. Mr. Brinton excused himself to his friends and disappeared in the direction of the rear.

Presently the leader of the orchestra, a gray-haired man with a huge nose and thick eye-glasses, took his seat and rapped sharply with his

violin bow. The hum of conversation about the hall ceased as the musicians struck into a medley from a popular comic opera. As they finished, Mr. Brinton came back to his seat, and his return amid the final crashing chords of the medley was met by hand-clapping.

As the first number on the programme the Romanellis were billed to appear. They were described — decoratively but somewhat indefinitely — as equilibrists; in the days of simple speech they would have been called jugglers. There was no hint to indicate the number or sex of the Romanellis, but when the curtain went up it uncovered the fact that there were two of them, a man and a young woman. Mr. Romanelli was tastefully attired in a regulation swallow-tailed coat, black satin knee-pants, black silk stockings, and white shoes; as the curtain rose he bowed and pulled off his white gloves, rolling them deftly between his hands and tossing them aside. Mrs. — or perhaps Miss — Romanelli, a tired-looking girl with hard lines about her mouth and eyes, wore a sky-blue décolleté gown with a very short skirt and white stockings. The two artists retreated toward a large table on which a part of their paraphernalia was placed. The table was covered with a cloth of maroon flannel, and on the side which overhung

toward the audience was embroidered in slightly tarnished gilt thread, "The Romanellis." Each Romanelli seized from the table a wand and a large plate and upon the wands spun the plates vigorously in the air to the accompaniment of a jingling galop. Then Mr. Romanelli, continuing to spin the plate, picked up a large platter and spun it on the end of his forefinger, his partner meanwhile keeping three colored balls popping dexterously into the air. Next Mr. Romanelli lay flat on his back on a small platform. On to the soles of his upthrust feet his wife — or perhaps his sister — placed an oblong bamboo screen. In each hand he held a short wand and a saucer. The orchestra struck up a slow waltz, and Mr. Romanelli commenced simultaneously to spin the saucers on the tips of the wands and to revolve the bamboo screen by kicking it over and over, his sister — or his wife — glancing into the audience with smiles of triumphant pride. Some of the far-seeing mothers among the onlookers sighed in anticipation of the fearful destruction of crockery by such of their offspring as would doubtless endeavor next day to imitate this delightful feat. After a deal of other remarkable manipulation of balls and bottles and vases and flower-pots and open umbrellas, Mr. Romanelli came to his final effort.

Taking a large champagne bottle, he carefully balanced it on its neck on a light chair, and, slowly raising the chair, he seized the lowest rung firmly in his teeth. Miss — or Mrs. — now stepped forward and put into each of his hands two green balls, which he kept tossing into the air, all the while maintaining with agonized eyes the equipoise of the champagne bottle on the chair which he was holding in his muscular mouth. During this time the music went on with a continuous roll from the snare drum, which burst into a final crash of cymbals as Mr. Romanelli cast away the green balls and let the chair fall from between his powerful jaws, catching it in one hand, the champagne bottle in the other. Setting down the chair but still holding fast to the bottle, he bowed himself into the wings, his niece — as was discovered upon inquiry — following with a generous fixed smile and a pleased flirt of her sky-blue skirts. There was a volley of applause, and Mr. Brinton leaned over to King.

"He's pretty good, isn't he?" he commented. "But I wish I could have got Zoloso — the great Zoloso, you know. I was afraid he'd be a little too warm for this town. You see his best trick is balancing himself on his head on a swinging trapeze, and taking off his coat and vest and pants. Some of these Methodists might get up

and go out before they discovered what was going to happen."

"That's true enough," King agreed.

"But Zoloso's a wonder," the dominating spirit continued reflectively. "He could stand on his head and play a Strauss waltz on a coach-horn, and there's very few of them, I tell you, can do *that*."

The novelist felt inclined to concede the limitation.

The second number had originally been set for the rendition of a solo by a local soprano, Miss Gladys Mumford, the daughter of the proprietor of the local hay-and-feed emporium. Miss Mumford possessed a very fair voice, but when Mr. Brinton heard that the song she proposed singing began, "Vision of loveliness, hear me; List to my passionate plea," he inflexibly eliminated Miss Gladys from the programme and substituted Jerry Brown, a negro entertainer.

Out and in front of the green drop-curtain shambled the very black Jerry. He was extremely heavy, and lumbered painfully along, attired in a flapping dress suit, with tremendous trousers which he manipulated with evident difficulty. Large as he himself was, his trousers, it is quite safe to say, would have furnished suffi-

cient material to make a number of complete suits for an even more ponderous man; they could have comfortably clothed a small elephant or a Mrs. Al Squires. Fixing the assemblage with a broad grin, Jerry burst with a hoarse baritone into his opening song. At the end of the first verse he essayed a dance of a few shuffling steps and kicks, but to his distress he only succeeded in time after time tripping himself in his huge trouser legs, and sitting down with a resounding thud in a cloud of dust on the wooden stage. At each collision between the floor and Jerry's anatomy the audience laughed with fresh and increased joy. Finally the performer, with a comic air of desperation, reached down inside his waistcoat, seized his trousers, drew them upward, and attached the waistband firmly to his collar button. In hearty appreciation of his ingenuity came a spontaneous shout of delight from the onlookers. After singing two or three songs, and completely convulsing the audience with several trite comments on local subjects, which had been interpolated by Mr. Brinton after consultation with Mrs. Al Squires, Jerry shambled into the wings, and the curtain rose, disclosing Professor Vincent and his trained swans.

The professor — whose degree had doubtless

been gained in an aviary — was seen, dressed in a frock-coat and a tall silk hat which he flourished cheerfully at the audience, and then replaced carefully on his head, repeating this salutation with a pleased smile under his waving blond mustache after each exhibition of intelligence on the part of his feathered charges. The exhibitions consisted of a series of performances marked by laboriously dragged-out displays of something which verged upon discrimination on the part of the unhappy swans. A row of lettered blocks was shown, and from the letters a stout fowl selected those in succession which spelled its name — Sam. Professor Vincent rewarded Sam by taking from the pocket of his frock-coat a bit of raw fish — his coat pocket somewhat oddly seemed to be full of this delicacy — and slipping it dexterously into the protruding bill of his expectant pupil. With another flourish of his hat he announced, in a foreign accent, the next stupid feat which his unfortunate charges were prepared to do. At the conclusion of the act there were nominal manifestations of polite approval from the body of the house, but nothing like the enthusiasm which black Jerry Brown's successful manipulation of his enormous trousers had aroused was given to Sam Swan and the bowing and

scraping professor and the rest of the winged troupe.

The curtain fell again, the orchestra struck up the introduction to a lively song, and the Montague Sisters — Flora and Félice — skipped out from the wings. The impressionable young men throughout the house instantly succumbed to their pink cheeks and curling yellow hair and bare white arms and short silk skirts (which displayed their neat ankles and the suggestion of trimly stockinged legs) and their bright eyes and black eyebrows and lashes and their manner of sparkling vivacity. They were of almost exactly the same height and figure, but Flora had large blue eyes, while the effectively flashing orbs of Félice were smaller and seal-brown. And Félice had a long scratch upon her arm, while Flora exceeded her sister in the amount of gold fillings which her set smile displayed. They stood side by side in the centre of the stage, each with her feet together and her toes turned out, each bending forward a little from the hips and holding out her short skirts to the side with both hands. Extending their arms, they presently burst into a spirited lyric in which their passionate fondness for rackety-whackety boys and magnums of wine and the blisses of stolen kisses and dear old London town

were mingled in confused profusion. This song, saturated with a highly unconventional atmosphere of the true *joie de vie*, the blue-eyed and mischievous Flora insisted on gayly singing straight at the Methodist minister, who with downcast look stirred uneasily in his seat, while his wife colored with mortification and annoyance. Félice interpolated into her part a decided wink, which she shot ardently at Mr. Brinton, who received and promptly returned it with slightly amused gratification. After a repetition of the chorus the sisters took hold of hands and commenced to dance, each enlivening her ordinary steps by occasionally introducing a sudden kick over the other's head. This greatly pleased the majority of the audience, and among the young men there were many unspoken wishes for the more frequent introduction of this specific enlivenment. There was hearty hand-clapping, in which the minister and his wife failed to join, when Flora and Félice bounded off, rapturously kissing their hands in reluctant farewell.

For the edification of the Burnhamites Mr. Brinton had next provided "Laurence, the Paper Hanger," his own particular pride. The scene showed a thick-set, thuggish-looking person in a short sack-coat, and his wife, a watery-looking woman, in a blue wrapper. Laurence was holding

forth vigorously on the subject of domestic economics. Useless expenses had been incurred; he intended to put an end to at least one of them; the room needed repapering, and he purposed doing the job himself instead of employing at a large cost some fellow who was most likely incompetent and would probably steal their silverware. To paper a room was comparatively simple, anyway, to any man of brains; a step-ladder, some paste, a brush — and there you were! The watery-looking woman began to protest feebly, sceptical of his ability, but Laurence was determined. He bustled out and brought in the ladder and the bucket of paste and the brush and the rolls of wall-paper. His wife timidly suggested that he change his clothes; Laurence rejected this suggestion with considerable indignation; *he* didn't intend to spill anything; why, the job was scarcely more difficult than licking a postage stamp. The watery-looking woman accepted his decision with almost tearful resignation, and Laurence ascended the step-ladder. But no sooner had his work begun than strange and unexpected difficulties rushed to the fore. Several times he fell off the ladder before he reached the top, somewhat to his impatience. Then, to his surprise and chagrin, the paper stubbornly declined to adhere to the

wall. On his third fruitless attempt to effect the desired result, he lost his balance and stuck one arm in the glue pail, drawing it suckingly out with what to the delighted audience seemed evidently to be a smothered oath. Hastily reascending the ladder, he went too far and fell headlong over its top, alighting on his hands and turning a somersault. By this time the watery-looking woman was sobbing in a corner. Frenzied with rage, Laurence now seized the paper and the brush and dashed up the steps again, while his wife stood wringing her hands helplessly. Untoward fate again met him, and this time he pitched off head-first into the paste bucket. Hurriedly getting on his feet, with the bucket sticking on his head, he commenced to disentangle himself from the roll of paper. The orchestra began to play softly, and the unfortunate amateur paper hanger began dancing in time to its strains, the long roll unfolding behind him. Still firmly clasping the brush, with the paste oozing down his face, becoming more and more entangled in the unreeling roll at every step, Laurence presented in his frantic appearance a sight so ludicrous that the audience — especially the gallery — fairly shouted with laughter. The curtain fell, leaving him wholly wound in the meshes of the paper, and in a really remarkable

predicament. Mr. Brinton asserted with some pride that he had told them that Laurence was all right.

After the stage had been cleared of the mess which the paper-hanging act had made, the Swiss Bell Ringers appeared. The astonishing quantities of whiskey-and-water which they had swallowed while sitting stolidly in the café of the hotel had not affected them in the least, somewhat to the surprise of those who had noticed the extraordinarily long and strong potations they had succeeded in consuming. They gave a very acceptable performance.

Next on the programme came a short farce, and then was the Carolina Quartette, and to the tremendous delight of the Methodists it turned out to be the colored train crew of Mr. Brinton, dressed in loud black-and-white checked suits and reënforced by a brother baritone. The well-known dusky faces were instantly recognized, and a great tide of applause swept through the hall, while Mr. Brinton turned around in his seat and waved his hand to Mrs. Al Squires, whose own fat hands were pounding each other like two adipose fleshy trip-hammers. The Carolina Quartette performed with great credit and held their own among the professionals without the slightest difficulty.

Let us dwell lightly upon the remainder of the vaudeville. Joe Kelly and McGuire Tim in their knockabout sketch entitled "Brannigan's Vacation." The Glonduro Trio — their first appearance in America (as they were always advertised) direct from a certain London music hall, which as a matter of fact had been torn down some five years before. Mademoiselle Marseilles, the highest soprano in the world, whose voice almost reached the number of vibrations per second inaudible to the human ear. All of the artists delighted, and the audience departed in rare good humor, most of them returning directly home and to bed, a few of those with sporting inclinations stopping at the Inn, where they were gratified in being able to watch the Swiss Bell Ringers sitting stolidly in the café, consuming a long series of vigorous nightcaps. At the Brinton house the commander entertained at supper. Besides those in his party at the performance, there were also present the Methodist minister and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Al Squires, and several other villagers who had in various ways endeared themselves to the dominating spirit. During the course of the supper Mr. Brinton arose and in a short speech announced that it would be his pleasure to defray the entire expenses of that evening's performance, leaving the gross receipts

to be applied toward erecting a structure suitable to house the body and intellect of his friend, the worthy man who was destined to occupy it (he hoped) for many a year. The minister, who had been shocked into almost a nervous paralysis by the actions of Miss Flora Montague, brightened up at this concrete evidence of good-will, for midnight fell upon the certainty of his new home.

XII

WITH a complete mutation of purpose, May Brinton decided that instead of restraining her father, she would thrust him forward, in the hope of thereby strengthening her position toward King. It was a dangerous liking that she was forming for the novelist, and her pride turned her very slowly to this new determination; but she was clever enough to see that he was very rapidly progressing in his friendship with Eleanor, and that the only way to prevent him from marrying her was to arrange for her speedy annexation by some one else. Whether it was not already too late, whether this could now be accomplished, was very dubious; but if it could be done at all, May knew the one man best suitable to lead the attack,—John S. Brinton. It would be impossible for any man of King's own type to compete successfully on his own ground, because King had gone too far to be caught by any pursuer on the same course, but Eleanor might be ambushed and carried off from a new point; certainly the appearance of

Mr. Brinton as an active aspirant might reasonably be expected to be crowned with a strong hope of victory. In this wise May had been gradually swung into a curious reversal of position.

In the beginning of the renewal of her friendship with Eleanor, she had been suspicious and jealous of Mr. Brinton's open approval of the girl. She had blocked the growth of their friendship in every way she was able, and had interposed every conceivable safeguard against the increase of their mutual liking; and when King had come to be considered in the light of a possible candidate for Eleanor's affections, May had welcomed his candidacy and extended to it her unqualified support. But with the calorescence of her own feelings toward the novelist, perplexities clouded the foreground of her operations. Her difficulty lay in that she had ceased to regard him as a mere figure which might be placed as an effective obstacle against any sign of a dash forward on the part of her energetic and resourceful father; she had come rather to consider King an extremely eligible man, whose eligibility she had heretofore failed to appreciate, and whose steps she had injudiciously turned toward another girl.

At this time she was merely rivalling in her heart with the unconscious Eleanor over the pos-

session of King, while the capitalist hung in the balance of her apprehensions. To be sure, if the novelist should win the other girl, as May had set out by desiring, Mr. Brinton would be safe again, for naturally Miss Hyde could accept only one of the two, and this was a certain consolation. But against her new desires, this consolation was absolutely insufficient. Already May had her father, though somewhat insecurely, but King was an independent prize at stake, and she confessed to herself that she wanted him very badly. And she wanted him so badly that finally she made a radical move. Instead of casting him in the way of Mr. Brinton, she interposed Mr. Brinton to block his progress. Instead of cherishing jealous anxiety lest her father be caught by the charms of the brown-eyed New England girl, she came to desire beyond all other things that very one thing which formerly she had apprehended; from a fear lest her father might form the purpose of marrying Eleanor, she came around into a sincere wish that he would arrive as speedily as possible at a conclusion of her desirability; instead of placing King so as to trip Mr. Brinton's advance, she purposed taking up King for herself and setting down Mr. Brinton in his stead. It was an odd situation; May's idea in attempting to save to herself a pos-

sible suitor from the girl of his apparent choice by putting forward her own father as a rival was certainly a most unusual one. And she resolved to make a sounding of the capitalist's inclinations, and upon a favorable diagnosis to accelerate his advance in the direction she now wished him to go.

And there was some justification for her step besides the popular refuge in the proverb that all is fair in love. Not a definite word had King uttered to indicate that his affections were truly fixed upon Eleanor; moreover, it was quite likely that next to her he regarded May herself as highly as any girl he knew. May considered that she had every right to eliminate the leader and reverse their respective positions could she do so fairly and with dignity, and her motive in projecting her father into the fore was based on this consideration. If Eleanor could be taken away and King left free to set his next choice upon whom he pleased, Miss Brinton confidently cherished the not unreasonable hope that the choice would be set upon herself.

The substitution of Mr. Brinton for King would be by no means a bad one for Eleanor. For all the novelist was clever and attractive, the capitalist could give her a great deal which the younger man could not. To be sure, May's father was lacking

in the freshness of youth, but with his buoyancy of temperament and his hurtling energy he took up his impost of years like a feather. Then, too, he had everything that money could buy, a great deal of an excellent quality of everything within that limitation — and money can buy an extraordinary number of pleasant things when one goes about flourishing unlimited resources after the manner of Mr. Brinton. With the Brinton millions and Eleanor's own grace and tact and beauty, she could easily come into a social position which May had been too indifferent to assume. Briefly, the rampant plutocrat was by no means an undesirable match, and May honestly felt that Eleanor might be far more happy with him than with some one of many other men closer her age and tastes and free inclinations. She sounded her father on the subject with elementary directness.

"Papa, I want to ask you something," she remarked one evening.

"Shoot it out," said the good-natured capitalist.

May regarded him seriously, earnestly, gravely.

"Have you ever thought of marrying again?" she inquired.

The commander, completely taken aback by this unexpected interrogation, attempted to stifle a blush — a tribute to the shock and penetrating

power of his daughter's question. Under the calm eyes of his examiner he felt a chafing guilt such as a small boy feels when he is detected after some characteristic misdemeanor. He felt that his record was not wholly clear, and indeed in day-dreams he had more than once dared a glance into the magic mirror, although he had never shattered the glass and awakened to face the realities of renewed matrimony.

"Why, I don't know that I ever did," he replied with shifty uneasiness. He had been thrown on the defensive with an abruptness which had momentarily confused him.

"Why not?" said May.

Mr. Brinton's confusion increased. This second question was inexplicable — it sounded as though it were leading toward an encouragement of something which he had several times previously been furnished weighty reasons for presuming May would violently oppose. There came into his mind two plausible avenues of retreat. With a show of spurious emotion he might say that his heart was buried with May's mother (with whom he had been constantly at odds), and that never would he take another woman to fill her place in his life. Or he might say that because of the sorrow her death had caused him, he was loath to

repeat an experiment which might end in a similar sad manner. Although neither of these two explanations was quite satisfactory or exactly sincere, he felt that clearly some suitable allusion to the late Mrs. Brinton should be made; yet he could think of none.

"Why not?" May repeated.

"Why should I?—tell me that," he inquired with a desperate assumption of total innocence.

May sat down in a wicker easy-chair.

"Oh, lots of reasons," she responded cheerfully.

Her father scented an ambush and warily declined to be drawn forward.

"Now what are you driving at, May?" he asked.

"Well," said his daughter, slowly, "I've often thought it would be a good idea for you to marry again, and as I was afraid you'd think I would oppose anything of the sort, I decided to tell you what I'd concluded."

Mr. Brinton might have retorted that his own conclusions of her opposition had not in the past been wholly fanciful, but a positively brilliant idea occurred to him, and he turned interrogator.

"Are you getting tired of your old father?" he inquired, with an odd mixture of real curiosity, attempted tenderness, and a sort of casual reproach.

"Oh, dear no!" responded the girl, in hasty protest. She went over and seated herself on the wide arm-rest of her father's big chair, putting her arm around his neck. "Not at all. You shouldn't say such a thing." Mr. Brinton had really been very kind to her in a thoughtless way, and she realized it. "But I've been thinking," she repeated.

"A great mistake for a girl your age," returned the capitalist, with attempted levity, patting her hand.

May declined to be diverted.

"You've always liked girls — and women — and they've always liked you," she continued.

"Oh, I don't know about that," the commander replied, mildly deprecating this accusation of popularity on either side.

"I don't mean that I'm discontented — or anything of that sort. Of course it's very nice to go along as we're going now, but I'm thinking of the future," said May, gravely. "We can't go on this way forever."

"I don't expect to," responded Mr. Brinton, shortly. Indeed, if immortality could have been purchased, the threat of any mutation would have long since been stifled, regardless of expense.

"I'm afraid Cousin Elizabeth isn't very companionable to you," his daughter continued.

This Mr. Brinton tacitly conceded. Miss Wylie made a fairly presentable figurehead; she filled her place in the household without especially ornamenting it; but she was at best inoffensive, and she lacked every quality of human interest which the head of the establishment sought and demanded from his associates.

"And I may not always be here," said May.

Her father turned and looked hurriedly up at her.

"What in the devil do you mean, May? Do you feel sick, or are you trying to tell me you're going to marry some fellow?" he exclaimed.

His daughter blushed a little at these pardonable inquiries. She gave a nervous laugh.

"Neither," she replied. "I'm feeling perfectly well, and I'm not thinking of marrying any one just at present; but that's not saying that my health will always be good — or that I shall always be here with you."

The commander took out a large cigar and thoughtfully bit off the end.

"Well, May, who is it?" he asked curiously.

His daughter interposed a quick denial.

"No one, of course," she protested. "Didn't I just tell you I wasn't thinking of marrying any one?"

The capitalist smiled.

"You've missed my point," said he. "Who's the girl — or the woman? You wouldn't come and put the marriage proposition up to me this way unless you had some one definite in your head. The whole thing's definite all the way through. Marriage is no abstract theory of happiness; it's either the real thing, or it's hell. Come now, who is it?"

May hesitated, but after a while she spoke.

"Well, I was thinking of Eleanor," she confessed.

The commander looked surprised, and then he smiled again.

"Eleanor Hyde?" he said.

"Yes," his daughter replied. "Don't you think she's fine?" she asked anxiously. "She's awfully pretty." The admission cost her a pang when she thought of King, for all she herself was by no means destitute of physical charm.

"She's certainly that," Mr. Brinton conceded.

"And she's tactful and graceful and nice and — and everything you'd wish," urged the girl.

"Yes. I thought Hamilton King had reached the same conclusion," the capitalist responded dryly.

"Oh, every one does," May quickly rejoined.

"No one could help it. But I don't believe Mr. King cares more for her than any of us do."

"Don't you? Well, *I* believe he does," retorted her father, bluntly. "I tell you what I'll do, May." He put one leg over the other and puffed his cigar, reflecting. "I'll bet you three to two Ham King marries her within — well, say a year."

The color came into the girl's face. Her father's reduction of what might mean her future happiness or unhappiness to the level of a gambling proposition and a vulgar wager struck her with extreme disfavor.

"I don't think so — but I don't care to bet," she answered a little angrily. She collected herself again. "But you might just as well marry her as let Mr. King have her," she persisted.

The plutocrat got up out of his chair.

"Now, what in the world do you mean by all this, May?" he said. "I tell you you'd better drop it; this match-making business is what gets people into trouble—always. Match-making breaks up more families than it creates, in my opinion. Now, I'm not in the marriage market, anyway, and when it comes to Miss Hyde, I think she likes Ham King pretty well, and I know very well that he's in love with her. Say, do you want to put me into a race I'm not trained for and get me off

in the ruck and have your father beaten out at the finish by a clever young fellow who has everything in his favor except a lot of money? What do you think you're trying to do? It seems to me it's sort of queer, anyway, for a girl to try and marry off her own father to one of her school friends; I never heard of anything like it before. I don't understand it — I must say I don't understand it at all."

And he walked into the house.

All this while that May Brinton was being unhappily racked by conflicting emotions, Eleanor Hyde was sailing smoothly on the stream of quiet content. There was no elemental turbulence and turmoil in the temperament of the New England girl, who looked at a peaceful world through placid eyes and caught the sunshine back into her soul. Unaware that she was the rock upon which the happiness of more than one person was beating, she kept on her way with a singing heart. She could not help but see that in Hamilton King she held a partisan admirer, but she frankly liked him in return, and she knew of no one who might justly and rightfully wish to constrain their relations. Surely May Brinton least of all, — May, who had thrown them together on every possible

occasion, who had apparently been glad that they had fancied each other, who had taken up the thread of a slight acquaintance with her and carried it out with warm generosity into a real intimacy. In the sincerity of King's whole attitude toward her, Eleanor felt she possessed something presently to be more urgent than his friendship; but she did not hold back.

Early in August King's new story of *Harmony Dale* was published. On the day of publication two copies of the book were despatched to Burnham. One of them was directed in the handwriting of the author to Miss Eleanor Hyde; and the other, which had been expressed from a New York City book-shop, was addressed to Miss May Brinton. A short while before King had chanced to mention to May that his story was presently to appear, and she had expressed her interest in it.

"I'll send you up a copy when it comes out, if you like," the novelist had said.

"Oh, don't bother about it," the girl replied. "I'll order it from town. You can write something nice on the fly-leaf sometime when you're up here," she said with a light laugh.

King had suddenly fallen serious. At the moment there had come back into his mind something which long while had lain dormant but waxing in

the drift between imagination and conviction. He gave an odd glance at the girl.

"All right. But I'm not sure you'll want me to; I'm not sure you'll like the book," he said with a curious hesitation. He was by no means a vain man — quite the opposite; in his inmost belief he depreciated the measure of popularity he was able to achieve among women; he would have sincerely ridiculed the suggestion that Miss Brinton was in love with him; and yet he was not blind to the perception that her manner toward him had of late undergone a change. When he first met her she had been evidently anxious that he should like Eleanor; small things now showed that she was working to exactly the other end.

"I'm not at all sure you'll like it," he repeated thoughtfully.

May laughed.

"What a modest author!" she said. "I had no idea you were so lacking in self-confidence. What is there about it you think I won't like?"

But King did not explain.

Eleanor Hyde received her copy of the book out at the farm. Hiram, the hired man, fetched it from the village with the rest of the mail, and it lay on the table in the sitting room that day until Eleanor returned home to dinner. She saw the

handwriting — by this time familiar — and called out to her sister.

"Oh, Elizabeth, I think this must be Mr. King's story. He said he was going to send me a copy, you know."

The tall, spare form of the older girl came through the door from the kitchen.

"Open it, and we'll see."

Eleanor snapped the string with a pair of scissors and unwrapped the stiff brown paper. Inside was a volume bound in dainty gray, and on the cover were the name and some maple trees within a slender silver line. The girl opened the book, Miss Elizabeth looking interestedly over her shoulder. She turned back to the fly-leaf; in King's chirography was written down the page, "E. H. from the author." On the title-page was printed, "*Harmony Dale.* By Hamilton King, author of *Gray Stars*, *The Fourth Favorite*, and other stories," and the additional data of publication. She turned over the leaf, and on the next page in the centre of the white space she read, "To E. H."

In the first surprise of the moment Eleanor stood looking at this unexpected dedication — a dedication so sudden and direct as to be almost a declaration — in blank silence. Confusion and

maidenly embarrassment were uppermost in her mind, but beneath them was a strong rising tide of glad pride that King had given her his work before all the world. The flush of color which had come into her cheeks gradually went out of them again, but her eyes shone very bright. This tribute had come to her both unasked and unoffered, and from the man who had begun to be before all others in her thoughts. Of all the people he knew the world over, this brilliant young writer had chosen to come up into the lonely Connecticut hills and lay his book at the feet of a slim girl with brown eyes, who could give him nothing in return except — She turned to meet the questioning look of her elder sister.

"Well?" asked Miss Elizabeth, in constrained excitement.

"'E. H.' Do you think E. H. means me?" Eleanor asked in return, half protestingly, half anxiously.

Her sister smiled with a degree of perception.

"Didn't Mr. King tell you he was going to do it?" She reflected. "Didn't he ask your permission to do it?" she inquired.

"Ask my permission? — of course not; he never said a word about it," the girl replied. "How do you know he meant me, anyway? E. H.

are very common initials — I'm always getting my things mixed up with Eliza Hodge's. Besides, I don't believe it's necessary to ask permission of a couple of initials to dedicate a novel to them," she argued. "Perhaps he *did* ask permission of the real E. H. — whoever that may be."

Miss Elizabeth reached over and took the gray volume and turned back two pages to the fly-leaf, pointing at it. "E. H. from the author."

Eleanor wavered.

"Well, I think it's very nice of him — if he really means me."

Her elder sister smiled silently.

"Although I don't quite see how I can find out whether he really does," she finished.

"You might ask him," Miss Elizabeth suggested with a trace of amusement.

The younger girl looked at her with some indignation.

"Ask him? How perfectly absurd, Elizabeth! I'd rather die first."

And she walked out of the room — bearing with her the gray volume. Miss Elizabeth looked after her, still smiling, but a little wistfully.

May Brinton had been playing tennis that morning with Stuffy Smith, who was again the guest of

the Brintons, for the dominating spirit had found the yellow-haired youth moping alone in a corner of the club-house during the progress of some Coney Island horse-races, and had kind-heartedly carried him off to the scene of his recent amatorial reverses. May played a strong game of tennis, and much to her delight she had succeeded in defeating the chunky visitor. She came into the house very hot, with her hair almost down her back and a big grass stain on her duck skirt where she had slipped and fallen, but in excellent humor. Calling out some laughing taunt to her vanquished opponent, who had stopped to light a cigarette, she ran upstairs and opened the door of her room. On the little table beside her bed lay a small express package. She glanced at it and decided to wait until dressing for lunch before opening it; then she looked at the name of the sender and saw that it was that of the New York bookseller with whom she dealt. In the possibility that the parcel contained King's new novel, she laid down her racket, took up a pair of scissors from among the silver articles which lay on her dressing-table, and cut the strings. The undoing of the wrappings disclosed the gray binding of *Harmony Dale.*

May lifted the book rather gingerly in order

"'You might ask him.'"

that she might not soil it, and opened it at the first chapter. She read lightly through a paragraph or two, and then turned back to see the title-page. But between lay the dedication, "To E. H." The girl looked at this casually, without at first perceiving its significance; and then she suddenly saw, and for the first time bitterly knew what she had heretofore forced herself into denying.

"To E. H." Eleanor Hyde! The blood rushed into her face, and she set down the book as though it had burned her, and stood looking at it. And as she looked, *Harmony Dale* slowly closed on the tell-tale page, and May felt that the dedication had shut out the chance of the fulfilment of her most strongly cherished desire. It never occurred to her for an instant that E. H. might be another than Eleanor. She accepted the situation frankly.

She looked down, and her eye caught the blotched green stain on her white skirt; she frowned and glanced again at the gray book lying innocently among its wrappings. She hastily lifted her look and by chance caught sight of herself in the big oval mirror. It gave her back, standing in the middle of the cool, neat room, very hot and tired looking, her sleeves rolled up and her hair disordered, and her eyes steely cold above her flushed cheeks. Outside, the step of

Stuffy Smith was heard passing down the hall to his room.

May sat down rather suddenly, and stared blankly, steadily, out of the window over the lawn, and as the flush slowly faded out of her face, the light seemed to fade out of the sky. She looked helplessly about her, and the hot tears came into her eyes.

XIII

MAY BRINTON was unfortunate in that she lacked the buoyant temperament of her father, and the following days went very gloomily with her. Her state of mind was perceptible to the most of those with whom she came in contact, and Stuffy Smith, who was at no time distinguished for tact, confessed that he found his young hostess uncommonly difficult to please. As a matter of fact the girl's heart had suffered slightly and her pride had been badly hurt. For although she had not lost any of her dignity in the eyes of the outer world, she knew in her soul that she had tried to gain away the superior favor of a certain man, and that she had failed. In this temper she met the proffered confidences of her guest more acidly than was necessary or even merciful in consideration of the lacerated condition of his own affections.

"May," said the chunky youth, one evening, "if you were a man, what would you do if — if the girl you — you wanted to marry — well, threw you down?"

Miss Brinton looked at him a trifle scornfully; it seemed incredible that this insipid young man with the round, pale blue eyes and the molasses-colored hair and the expression of profound stupidity could be stirred by the sweep of a high passion.

"I don't know. I might shoot myself," she replied kindly.

This was scarcely the sort of soothing sympathy for which the depressed Sturtevant was secretly yearning. He was promptly shut to silence.

Since the publication of *Harmony Dale* nothing had been seen or heard of its author. It was supposed that King was in New York, but no word of any sort came from him.

May was quite willing that his absence be continued. The thought of her defeat was almost intolerable to her, and she would have wished to be able to forget her over liking for him as speedily as might be. She was angry with herself for having allowed him to come into her life so dangerously far, and she was sincerely and bitterly trying to force him from the outverge of her memories. There was no resentment in her heart toward any one except toward herself, and that was for her own folly and presumption. With Eleanor she maintained an attitude of armed neutrality with-

out giving her any reason to suspect that their relations had in any way changed. But when she next met Eleanor, her curiosity led her into the very subject which the other girl would have been reluctant to take up.

"Have you read Mr. King's new story?" she asked.

Her friend looked slightly conscious.

"*Harmony Dale?* Yes. It's very pretty, isn't it?"

"Very — as much of it as I read," May replied. She hesitated to acknowledge that she had read it twice over, jealously catching up the development of the heroine in a self-scourging effort to perceive an idealized Eleanor through the writer's inspiration.

"What did you think of the dedication?" she inquired.

The other girl was forced to meet the advance. She laughed a little forcedly.

"'To E. H.'? I don't know."

"Why, you're E. H., aren't you?" May said quickly.

"Why, really I don't know that either," her friend replied. "E. H. are very common initials," she casually added.

"Didn't he tell you he was going to do it —

going to dedicate it to you?" Miss Brinton persisted with heightened interest.

Eleanor shook her head.

"If I am E. H., he didn't tell E. H.," she answered with a smile. "And I haven't seen him or heard from him since the book came out," she volunteered.

"Is that *so?*" responded her friend, with surprise.

The New England girl laughed again, and this time more frankly.

"To tell the truth, May, I'm rather curious about it. I'd like to know. If Mr. King really meant to dedicate it to me, it's — well, it's very flattering — don't you think? — and I should like to thank him. Although I suppose if he *had* meant me, he would have said so," she finished.

"Yes. I should have thought he would," Miss Brinton said slowly. "But you're sure to find out sooner or later, of course," she added.

"Oh, not necessarily," her friend answered quickly. "I shan't ask him," she said, smiling.

"I think he'll probably tell you," was in the other girl's thought, although she was silent.

That evening the Brinton party was augmented by the arrival of Charlotte Worthington and of Oliver Burgess, who had inadvertently taken the

same train and been forced to entertain her during the entire trip. Charlotte apparently considered that the fact of her having had the mumps on a previous visit to the Brintons put the Brinton family under distinct obligations to receive her again into their home. She entirely lost sight of the fact that she had caused her hosts a great deal of trouble, and she seemed to take the view that they had in some way been responsible for the malady she had contracted; and she illogically concluded that it was their duty to atone for their previous erratum by exerting themselves to the utmost so that her second stay might be made more pleasant for her. And the Brintons, because they were easy-going and good-natured people whom generous entertaining did not inconvenience at all, tolerated this groundless and astonishing conclusion of Charlotte's with equanimity, although they left her mainly to her own devices. As for Burgess, he had found town tiresome and was glad of an excuse to get away, as he explained at dinner.

"Of course for a busy man New York's a good little village in August," he said. "But, then, I'm not a busy man. You see although it's pretty hot sometimes, if you work hard enough, you don't notice the heat, and by the time of day you stop

working and notice it, it begins to cool off. Then it's nice and informal and not crowded, with matting on the floors and all the men sitting around the clubs in their shirt sleeves; and you see a lot of chaps you like, who in the winter are tied up to one set of social connections while you are tied up to an entirely different one, but in August both your sets are away and you have a chance to get together. And there's lots to do — there are dozens of concerts and roof gardens and horse-races and ball games, and the kind of joints that are full of electric lights and frankfurter sausages and water chutes; and you dine around at queer places and get your breakfast at a table out on the sidewalk, and perhaps some chap takes you up the Sound on his yacht over the week end, or some one asks you up in the country — like this. Yes, New York's a good little town, but I was pretty tired of it, and I was glad to get the chance to slide out for a few days."

"Is any one we know in town?" May asked.

"Oh, occasionally some girl you know is going through. There are plenty of men; I saw Bill Risley and Nat Collins and Eliot Frame this morning."

"How did Eliot look?" inquired Mr. Brinton, meaningly.

"He looked very well," Burgess answered. "He seemed to be really working — and he hasn't taken a drink since his engagement was announced — so far as any one knows."

"I don't believe in marrying a man just to reform him," Charlotte Worthington announced. She was chronically irritated at every engaged girl over her good fortune; she begrudged her sop of ephemeral happiness to the most pitiful fiancée.

"Would you rather have the man marry you to demoralize you?" Burgess inquired.

"Charlotte doesn't believe in marrying under *any* conditions, it would seem," was the somewhat caustic comment of the capitalist, as he winked at Stuffy Smith.

"Or perhaps Miss Worthington considers that all men are in need of reformation, and that makes her so reluctant," put in Burgess again, revenging himself for what she had caused him to undergo on the train.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if Eliot turned out very well. I believe he's got it in him," May remarked.

"I hope he does. Pauline is a very good, sweet girl," Mr. Brinton said with quite uncommon gravity.

"So is Alice," remarked Miss Worthington, with

a meaning glance at Stuffy, who studied the floor with extraordinary attentiveness.

"Oh, yes," the commander hastened to concede.

"When are they to be married?" Miss Wylie asked.

"In the fall, I think," answered May.

"By the way, it's hard luck about Ham, isn't it?" Burgess remarked.

"About Mr. King? What?" inquired Charlotte, anticipating the inquiry of the others.

"Why, hadn't you heard? He's got typhoid," replied Burgess.

"No! Is that so?" said the capitalist.

"Is it a severe case?" Miss Wylie inquired, and May hung hungrily for the answer, stifling her eagerness to learn.

"I don't know. The fever started pretty high, but it's too early to tell," the novelist's friend responded.

"Well, that's too bad," said Mr. Brinton. "Ham King's a good fellow — a first-rate fellow. I always liked him. I hope he pulls through all right."

There was a sympathetic murmur of assent from the remainder of the table, especially from Charlotte Worthington, who looked on death with a particularly shuddering soul.

When May Brinton had suggested to her father

the propriety of his marrying again, she had sown a seed in fertile ground. As a matter of fact the character of the capitalist made him fertile ground for the reception of almost any sort of seed; he had an enormous plastic balance of activity and energy which he held free to invest, and any proposition which promised a fair return for the commensurate expenditure of those qualities of which he possessed a surplus was sure of careful consideration. He welcomed every equitable opportunity to extract action from the unspent power he held, and it came into his thought that May's suggestion was not by any means a bad one. He had cared for May's mother with the average affection which a young man directs toward his first wife, and now it was improbable that he could expend an equal affection upon any other woman, for that one had been his choice in the fresh, first ardor of his youth. Since her death his property interests had expanded so weightily that it would be impossible to brush them aside upon the entrance of any one other person into his life, but — the thought was rather a pleasant one. What did those interests mean, anyway, those interests for which she might substitute? They dealt almost wholly with purchasable things — and he was very, very tired of things

which he could buy. Certainly he could not buy Eleanor Hyde; whether she could be taken by any other means was doubtful, and the very doubt flavored a tentative pursuit with an agreeable zest. Clearly a second leap into matrimony would furnish him a new diversion for a while; it might be a permanent good. As May had pointed out, she would some day leave him; Miss Wylie was uncompanionable; and he was a little apprehensive of an old age which might be rather lonely except for those things which his great fortune could secure to him.

Mr. Brinton took occasion to bring up the subject upon the evening when the illness of King became known to the household in Burnham. This ran against the wish of his daughter. May at her worst was cold-blooded and speculatively selfish, and she was now at her very worst. Before she took a second step to speed her father toward the goal she had selected for him to achieve, she wished to ascertain whether or not King was likely to die, because if he should die, she would have sacrificed her father in her interests and gained nothing for her sacrifice. It was her part to play cautiously while matters were thus unsettled. But the dominating spirit was a difficult person to withhold against his careering

inclinations. His ways were the ways of no one else, and when he chose to set out upon a pursuit no human restraint or influence was of much avail to check him or to turn him down a by-road.

And May's words had caused him to observe Eleanor from a new viewpoint. He had always admired her for her prettiness and grace and charm, ever since the first day when he and King and Burgess had driven together to the Hyde farm. But that had been the admiration of a bystander, indirect, superficial, uncompelling; now the urge was creeping stealthily over him to have the girl for his own; he felt an odd forethrill of a bygone desire that was come again, — a desire to exercise proprietary rights over those wonderful brown eyes, which he had seen sometimes light and bright in the sun and sometimes holding well-deep darkness as the girl's mood went gloomily minor and her thoughts from gay to grave. Love! Could the old passion, years laid by, stir him again? Mr. Brinton commenced to hesitate, verging toward an affirmative reply.

"So you want to get rid of your father, do you?" he posed, when he and May were alone.

The swingback of sentiment came, and his daughter protested.

"Oh, no! Never!"

The capitalist disregarded her denial.

"I've almost come around to the conclusion that you're right," he said more thoughtfully than usual.

"I very seldom am," the girl replied, with an unnatural and unconvincing self-depreciation.

"You see I'm a little afraid of being lonely in my old age," said her father, with a seriousness that was simply astounding to his daughter, "and perhaps you've hit on a way out of it. I can't keep my speed up forever, and when I get ready to sit down I don't want to occupy an empty bench, you understand. Of course I'll probably always have a lot of money, and you're never literally lonely when you've got money, for there are always a lot of sociable leeches hanging on and trying to get it away from you, — relatives and college presidents and specialists and lawyers and fellows like that, — but that's not the crowd for me. I'd like something more in the line of company than I can get by signing a check for. I'm beginning to think pretty well, generally speaking, of your idea for me to marry again."

May was sincerely disturbed by this announcement. She never had meant to raise the general question; her proposal had been actuated solely by the desire of getting Eleanor out of her way, and now she was by no means certain whether

she wished this to befall. If Hamilton King were to die,—she caught her breath sharply,—she might far better keep her father to herself; certainly to have the plutocrat ranging the whole field with the certainty of eventual capture and the distressing likelihood that he would take into his life some one bristlingly objectionable to May—it was not to be tolerated. If it came to the actual performance of his conclusion, his choice must surely fall on Eleanor.

"I—I didn't quite mean that," she said in perplexity. "You see I wasn't thinking of any one except Eleanor."

"Not of me?" inquired her father, in some wonderment.

"Oh, of course," May brushed this misunderstanding lightly aside. "I mean for you to marry any one else."

"You think Miss Hyde's as desirable as all that?" asked the plutocrat.

"Well, you know her—you know what she is."

"Yes; I guess so," Mr. Brinton conceded. "Say," he said bluntly, leaning forward a little, "do you suppose she'd marry me, anyway?"

His daughter was in a dilemma. She did not wish to answer in the negative and precipitate her father's advance in a more undesirable direc-

tion, but if she replied yes to his question, he would most likely rush over and violently propose to Eleanor the very next day; and May wished to avert this. If Eleanor really cared for King, she would surely reject Mr. Brinton, who would have been needlessly humiliated to no benefit toward any one. If, on the other hand, she did not care for King, the temptation to accept what the capitalist could give her might be too strong to withstand; and then if King should not recover, May would have lost on both sides. Against this was the single chance (so it seemed to her) that Eleanor, heart-free to choose, might take the plutocrat and that King would recover. But even then there was no certainty that if the novelist should live and find Eleanor married, he would next to her choose May. King was not a man to be swayed by the gleam of a glance or overtoppled by a curving smile; he thoroughly understood the value of charm, as one who made his living by manufacturing it on a printed page, and Miss Brinton hesitated before submitting to the calculation of her attractions by one so skilled in their estimate. No, the combination of risks was too great.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Say, would you ask her — if you were me?" persisted the capitalist.

It struck the girl that it was somewhat curious for a father to go to his daughter for advice upon the conduct of a love-affair, but she reflected that she had herself with equal unconventionality advised him to set out upon this identical quest.

"Gracious! I don't know. Certainly not right away. She hasn't a glimmer of what you mean. Let the girl get used to the idea before you say anything definite to her," replied the cautious Miss Brinton.

And so while King lay burning up with a fever, the middle-aged millionnaire began his courtship of the New England girl, a courtship which was instantly perceived by the eager Charlotte Worthington.

"Where's Mr. Brinton?" asked Stuffy Smith, one day shortly afterward.

"Can't you guess?" Charlotte answered with a knowing smile.

"No," replied the chunky youth, with blunt, blank sincerity.

"You're pretty slow," said his companion, tantalizingly.

No one realized this more fully than the yellow-haired young man.

"Yes," he admitted. "I guess I am. But do

you know where he is?" he persisted, chancing to be desirous of knowing.

"Where is Eleanor Hyde?" said Charlotte, enigmatically.

"I don't know, Miss Worthington," Smith responded. "I suppose she's home," he hazarded.

"Well, then, that's where you'll probably find Mr. Brinton," his companion announced.

"Home? Whose home? Really! Why, what do you mean?" Stuffy asked, as the light began faintly to break over him.

"Can't you see?" said Miss Worthington. "As soon as Mr. Brinton hears that Hamilton King has typhoid, he rushes in and tries to cut him out with Miss Hyde. Haven't you noticed it?"

"Well, now that you mention it, perhaps I have — a little," Smith admitted.

Eleanor Hyde noticed it, too, and she was not a little puzzled. Evidently there had come some influence which had suddenly quickened the tempo of Mr. Brinton's attentions to her, but she was at a loss how to construe the favors which he was newly showering on her. And awkwardly enough for her, they were favors which she could think of no cogent reason for declining. The plutocrat was a domineering donor; at the slightest protest his

offence took the form of redoubling his offerings until the protester was fairly smothered under the very weight of the gifts she had attempted to decline.

And Eleanor could no more escape his society than his favors. He came frequently to the farm, and he often carried her off to whatever chanced to be the diversion of the hour. And all his attentions were marked by an adherence to lines of strictest decorum and propriety; Miss Wylie was constantly in evidence, and May herself helplessly watched her father's energetic pursuit of her school friend with a sort of dumb amazement at the very efficiency of the machine she had set in motion.

Mr. Brinton was no time-server nor was he a believer in halfway measures. He brought up his heaviest batteries and thundered at Eleanor's battlements with a reverberation that shook the countryside. The capitalist was no advocate of a campaign which began by the building of a willow cabin at the lady's gate; he unlimbered his largest guns and let fly a continual cannonade of convincing missiles. His tactics and motives were as little understood by most of the interested onlookers as by the girl herself. Few took them in the light of serious courtship. Some people advanced this theory, which gained many followers — that during

the serious illness of Hamilton King (who was popularly supposed to be in love with Eleanor) his friend, Mr. Brinton, was kindly attempting to divert the girl's thoughts and lighten her anxieties by leading her down a particularly primrose path of relentless gayety; and that behind the whole campaign of material pleasure there were two rather sad spirits, — those of the girl whose lover lay ill and of the man who was generously trying to turn her fears away.

As a matter of fact this was partly true — not in respect to the motives of the capitalist, but in the way in which Eleanor accepted the situation. She knew of the dangerous sickness of King, and her very heart was torn at his trouble and distress; but she had no given right to show her feelings to the world, and so she welcomed the diversions, which the unfathomable plutocrat provided for every idle minute, as some measure of relief to her secret anxiety. With the throng she laughed, but alone on the farm — alone with the trees and the stars and the meadow grass and the quiet night — her brown eyes often deepened as her thoughts went away to where a man lay fighting very hard for life — and for certain things which life meant to him.

And yet no climax came to the attack of the

dominating spirit. This was due not to any sluggishness on his part, but to a curiously discriminating spirit of justice. He considered it entirely fair to take advantage of King's absence and in that time to carry on his campaign; but the uncertainty of the man's survival was quite another matter. In the very beginning he had asked May whether she thought Eleanor was in love with King, and May had answered in a very decided negative. Mr. Brinton had taken her judgment with considerable relief, because he himself was convinced that Miss Hyde was certainly not wholly indifferent to the young novelist. And it was to satisfy this conviction that he was waiting. King's death would be a definite settlement to the whole affair, and Mr. Brinton would instantly have moved on Eleanor, for he was quite unable to conceive of any high fidelity to a mere memory. But just at present it was more mixed; he did not wish to be rejected upon the belief that King would recover, and certainly it would be most embarrassing to be accepted as the heir of a man who might disappoint mutual expectations by surviving and challenging for the inheritance. So Mr. Brinton waited.

Meanwhile Hamilton King was lying very close to the border line.

XIV

AFTER dinner — it was on an evening in late September — the furniture was swiftly and skilfully moved out of the drawing-room and the library and the hall of the Brinton house. A man went about carrying a box of powdered wax, which he sifted sparingly over the already highly polished hardwood floors. The dinner dishes were rapidly taken away, and upon the dining-room table were placed three huge cut-glass punch-bowls. Servants brought potted plants to fashion effective nooks, and festooned greens about the fireplaces and doorways and chandeliers. There was no excess of noise, no confusion; the preparations were being made by men who thoroughly understood their work.

Upstairs, the ladies of the Brinton household were dressing for the dance — Miss Wylie and May and the two Rawlins girls, and the men of the party — Mr. Brinton and Burgess and Eliot Frame — were taking their coffee and cigars in the billiard room. Mr. Brinton had determined to

signalize his departure from the village by giving a dance, to which he had bidden the most of his friends, both young and old.

"There's nothing like a dance," said the epigrammatic capitalist, "to get every one together. It makes the old feel young and the young old."

"Is Mrs. Squires coming?" Eliot Frame asked.

"Mrs. Al Squires? You bet she is," the dominating spirit replied. "I asked her to receive — I insisted on it — and I didn't have to insist very hard or very long."

"Mrs. Al will make a magnificent figure in a waltz," Burgess commented, thinking of the enormous proportions of the lady in question.

"She said she was afraid she was getting too old to dance," Mr. Brinton explained with perfect gravity, "and I told her I didn't think so, but anyway she could sit out in a hammock on the piazza and watch the younger people."

"Sit in a hammock — Mrs. Al? I'd like to see any hammock that would hold her," said Frame, with an incredulous laugh.

"You'd have to get up a hammock made of metal mesh — a sort of modern chain-mail effect and swung by real cables," Burgess suggested.

In a corner of the hall under the stairs the

men in charge of the arrangements were making a place for the musicians to sit. They rolled the big piano out from the drawing-room, and against it they stood a row of potted palms. On it they placed growing plants and twined vines and cut flowers. In the kitchen Mr. Brinton's servants took for the moment their orders from the New York chef, who had brought a corps of assistants and waiters and a load of materials for providing an elaborate supper. The chef was attending in person to the construction of a punch, which the commander had directed should be subtle yet stunning. In order to evade as far as possible all responsibility for any lamentable effects that this beverage might have upon susceptible natives, Mr. Brinton had especially ordered that it be colored bright red. The other bowls were designed to contain innocent yellow lemonade and brown café frappé, and the capitalist had advanced the opinion that any one who chose to pass such an obvious danger-signal and tempt fortune by attacking a liquor of such a sinister and suspicious hue deserved the discredit of a tactless public inebriation.

"Besides, I want to give every one a good time," said the dominating spirit, "and you know there are always a few people who don't really get

warmed up to a dance and enjoy themselves unless they get just a bit of an edge on."

The chef was pouring the contents of many suggestive-looking bottles and demijohns into a great tin can, his very soul intent upon the art of his occupation.

There came the sound of whirring machinery and of crunching gravel, and a streak of light flashed into the open windows of the billiard room as a touring-car shot up to the piazza. Mr. Brinton rose to his feet.

"Well, good-by. I'll be back in about twenty minutes."

"Where are you going?" Burgess asked.

"Over to get the Hyde girls," replied the commander. He put on a cap, a butler assisted him into a tan overcoat, and he stepped out on to the porch. Eliot Frame started to say something, and suddenly checked himself; Eliot had changed considerably since he had become engaged to Pauline Rawlins.

May Brinton came downstairs, slowly pulling her long white gloves up her arms. She was dressed in silver gray, which set off to advantage her dark hair and eyes, and over her shoulders was thrown a filmy gray silk scarf. Burgess and Frame rose as they saw her through the doorway.

"Don't get up, please," the girl said. "May I come in? I'm awfully early, but they wanted my room for a cloak room, and no one can tell, anyway, what time the guests will begin to arrive; papa asked some Burnham people to dine with us informally one day the first week we were here, and they all came at exactly noon." She sat down in an arm-chair.

Out in the library the man with the box of powdered wax continued to sift it over the floor. The chef had completed the manufacture of the sinister-hued beverage, and was calculating rapidly upon the disposition of the lettuce sandwiches. The bland, clear-voiced individual in knee-breeches, to whom had been detailed the duty of directing the arriving Burnhamites where to remove their wraps, took his station at the front door. The maids and attendants were ready in the dressing rooms. The musicians had just been driven up in an omnibus and were taking off their coats and uncasing their instruments and setting up their portable stands. The genial little cornet player looked through into the dining room, where stood the three huge punch-bowls freighted with soothing fluids; he called the attention of the cellist to the sight, winking and smacking his lips noisily, while the large, dignified waiter on guard

relaxed into a grave smile. The leader of the orchestra was busy sorting out the music which his men were to play. Miss Wylie, the colorless chaperon, appeared in the hall, dressed in black with a great many shining spangles which kept falling off during the evening; presently Alice Rawlins descended the stairway, shortly followed by her sister.

Soon the Burnhamites began to arrive. Time and close inspection had overcome their first awe of Mr. Brinton, but they still retained a very lively interest in the man who had playfully remarked that he liked their town a good deal, and that if his liking for it increased much further, he might be tempted to buy it and really make something out of it. This sounded like a joke, but in view of Mr. Brinton's reputed ability to carry out the suggestion, they were unable to subject their joint sense of humor to a satisfactory analysis of his real meaning. However, they accepted his invitations with avidity and in much the same way that they would have snapped up free tickets to a circus; and to tell the truth, the circus element was never wholly lacking in anything which the capitalist planned and gave; the dominating spirit himself always conveyed more or less the impression of a sort of tall-hatted ring-master, snapping

the long whip of his resources over his liberally imbursed performers.

The guests came slowly at first, trickling in, one or two at a time, and then with a rush, streaming up the stairway and flooding the cloak rooms. Most of the village youths and maidens came on foot, but there were numbers who arrived in buggies and buckboards and even carryalls, tying their horses to a long fence across the street, where under their cooling-blankets the nags stood restlessly stamping in the evening air. The Brinton house was ablaze with lights, the commander having run additional rows of incandescents along the piazzas and illuminated the grounds with numbers of electric bulbs of all colors. The sound of talking and laughter and instruments being set in tune came out on the night.

With a rush and a slash of wheels across the gravel curve, the big touring-car returned from its trip to the Hyde farm, and Mr. Brinton leaped nimbly out, assisting the Hyde girls to alight. He hurried into the drawing-room, where Miss Wylie and Mrs. Al Squires and May were receiving their guests. The city ladies recollected having met scarcely any of them, but Mrs. Squires lessened their embarrassments considerably by taking each newcomer heartily by the hand and volubly assert-

ing to Miss Wylie that she surely must remember so-and-so — to which Miss Wylie always gladly assented. Mr. Brinton upon his arrival instantly became everywhere, going from group to group with genial word and appropriate jest.

The music struck up into a slow, sweeping waltz, and dancing commenced. The saltatory exercises proper were taken by the local young men with tremendous gravity. They secured their partners and began revolving seriously down the long rooms. Mrs. Al Squires judiciously retired to the dining room, refreshing herself with a glass of lemonade and waving aside the crimson fluid which a solicitous waiter dipped out of the centre bowl and presented to her. The commander was seen to be walking on the piazza and talking animatedly with the wife of Ben Corwin, the druggist. Miss Wylie was shedding her spangles under the escort of no less a dignitary than the postmaster. Frame and Pauline Rawlins danced once around and then went out into the quiet garden. Frame laughed rather softly as he drew her arm through his.

"Somehow I don't care so much for that sort of thing as I used to," he said, nodding toward the house, gay with lights and voices and rhythmic music that broke the garden stillness.

The girl smiled a little.

"Don't you? Why?" she asked, knowing what the tone of his answer would be.

"Well, you're in the race when you go in for that," he said. "Most of those people are. But I'm not — I've won."

Pauline gave a quick glance up at him.

"You can really say awfully nice things when you want to, Eliot," she said.

"Oh, it's easy enough when you have the proper person to say them to," replied the young man. "Now, I dare say Mr. Brinton is getting equally eloquent with your friend, Miss Hyde; I saw him starting for this dance with her."

"Do you really think so?" his fiancée asked. "Do you suppose — that —"

"I don't pretend to know anything about it," Frame replied; "but I think it was unfortunate for Ham King that he got typhoid just when he did."

"Do you think she cared for him?" inquired the girl.

"That's just the trouble. I don't myself believe she'd gone quite that far. I don't make it a practice to study other people's love-affairs," the young man explained apologetically, "but I was rather interested in this game — because I'd

had such a fearful time getting you," he said with a slight laugh, "and I admit I watched them a little."

"What did you think?" asked Pauline, much interested.

"I think that just as — well, as things were coming around to a climax which might have turned out fortunately for King, he came down with the fever. And that left the game entirely in Mr. Brinton's hands, and he's an awful hustler and pretty clever, you know."

"Oh, he's fearfully clever — there's no doubt of that at all," the girl replied.

"And any girl would think twice before she discarded John S. Brinton," Frame continued. "Besides being clever he's got an enormous fortune, and he's not very old, — he's so lively you wouldn't suspect he was more than thirty-five, — and he's a good sport and open-handed and all that sort of thing. You know I like John S. — I like him a lot."

"He's always been very nice to me," Pauline admitted. "But he's so awfully flamboyant and melodramatic. Do you suppose Eleanor Hyde would take him?"

The man shrugged his broad shoulders.

"We'll find out pretty soon," he said. "Espe-

cially since I hear that Ham King's out of danger and getting better fast."

"Is he? That's good," the girl said. She sincerely liked the agreeable young writer.

"Yes; they let him see people now; he's pretty weak yet, but he's coming along — so Ollie Burgess was just telling me."

"I suppose we ought to go in," Pauline remembered. She rose from the bench where she had been seated, and started toward the house.

The evening's gayety was at its full height. The music flashed along the refrain of a rollicking two-step, and some of the warm and weary dancers refreshed themselves with the frequently replenished contents of the three huge punch-bowls, while the floors creaked under the rhythmic advance of the energetic remainder. Miss Wylie was dancing with a sallow-faced young man who was locally reputed for an invariable attempt on his part to do exactly the right thing and an equally invariable inability to carry out the attempt. He had been prompted by feelings of duty to ask the mistress of the house to dance with him, and he was now bearing that lady awkwardly through the rooms, bumping almost blindly into the other dancers and crashing and caroming against the walls and the palms and the bric-à-brac. Burgess

was guiding the younger sister of the postmaster past the danger zone of potted plants; his partner was a small, dark girl with a snub nose and sharp black eyes, and she danced violently and quite badly, ducking and bobbing irregularly along with great vigor. Her brother had secured May Brinton and was conducting her conservatively down the floor. The dominating spirit stood in the doorway and viewed the lively ensemble which his hospitality had made possible. He smiled with great self-satisfaction; not one of the earnest and perspiring dancers but was having an evening long to be remembered. All was going merrily — the pendulum of joy was at the top of its swift stroke. The commander turned to Eleanor Hyde, who was standing behind him.

"Say, will you come out on the piazza a few minutes?" he said. "I want to talk to you — about something."

In an oblong room with plain white walls a young man lay on a brass bed. His face and hands were very thin and white, and he was propped into a half-sitting position by three pillows skilfully placed behind him. The room was quite simply furnished, and the walls were bare except for a commonplace etching of Wash-

ington and a print which represented a fat horse drawing a canal-boat along the black water of a sadly neglected canal. Bottles of medicines, printed charts to be filled out by the attendant, and a small clock stood upon a glass-topped table. In a straight-backed chair a young woman in the gray dress of a nurse was reading a magazine; occasionally she glanced at her patient, who was staring wearily out the open window.

It was about six o'clock in the afternoon. The sun had long since fallen behind the roof-line of the conventional brick houses which edged the opposite side of the street, and the shadows were commencing to deepen. In front of the hospital stood a row of maple trees whose dusty leaves stirred slightly in the breath of breeze that came up from the river. The nurse looked at the young man.

"Would you like me to read aloud to you?" she asked in a level voice.

"No, thank you," said Hamilton King.

The yellow shade was pulled half down, and the barely stirring maple branches made shifting, spotted black shadows on it. A watering-cart drove by, and following it the smell of warm, wet asphalt came up to King's window. Over on the thoroughfare that ran north and south rose the

hum of thronging thousands and the dull roar of vast traffic as the city took its way homeward to supper. The rattle of wagons and the clang of trolley gongs came penetratingly into the side street as the various vehicles speeding along the avenue passed its intersection. On the pavement before the hospital several small boys were tossing a ball with shrill cries. The young man who lay on the brass bed, propped up by pillows, was very quiet, watching the light fade slowly out of the straight ribbon of sky which fell into the narrow street. There came a tap on the door, and the nurse laid aside her magazine and stepped noiselessly into the hall. Presently she reëntered.

"Mr. Sturtevant Gregory Smith has called," she said, reading the name from a visiting-card. "I think you might see him if you cared to. Would you like to see him?"

King moved restlessly, but his eyes did not leave the open window.

"Yes," he said. "Ask him up, please." He could not imagine why Stuffy should take the trouble to come and see him — it seemed quite unlike Stuffy; but perhaps the chunky youth had some particular reason for calling. At any rate his visitor was a link between him and Burnham, and during his illness that chain of communication

had been badly disarranged. There had come to him no word from Eleanor Hyde (since the note in which she thanked him for sending her the book), which was entirely natural, and there had come to him no word of her — which was almost intolerable. The Brintons had been very kind; they had filled his room with roses and guava jelly and numberless other luxuries and delicacies for which he had no use; and twice the good-natured capitalist had called in person to inquire concerning King's progress toward recovery; but it was an unsatisfactory sort of easy generosity which they practised, thought the young novelist. Better one look into Eleanor's brown eyes than — His thoughts broke abruptly.

"Mr. Smith," announced the nurse, and the yellow-haired youth entered, carrying his light overcoat on his arm and stepping very softly, although his shoes squeaked a little, which made for his vast chagrin. King turned toward him.

"Hello, Stuffy," he said in a rather weak voice, and he put out a thin hand which his caller cautiously took. "It's very good in you to come up here."

The nurse set down a small chair so as to face the bed, and Smith seated himself somewhat gin-

gerly. He had no specific purpose (except the delivery of a bottle of Scotch whiskey which he thought the convalescent might fancy) in visiting King, but since his rejection by Alice Rawlins he had formed a hazy high desire toward the performance of what he vaguely termed the right thing. It dimly went through his sluggish mentality by an irregular route of reasoning that it would be kind and perhaps even gratifying to his sick friend to be visited.

"I'm very glad to see you," said King, as genially as his physical weakness allowed. "How is everything?"

Smith fingered his hat.

"All right, I guess," he replied. "I brought you a bottle of Scotch that's supposed to be something pretty good — they tell me Scotch is a good tonic for a chap that's been laid up. How are you, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm getting along fairly well," King answered. "And I'm very much obliged for the Scotch. It's a little slow here at times; I'm afraid I'm damned impatient every once in a while. (Miss Lynch doesn't mind plain damns — she's acclimated.) Yes, it's pretty slow."

"It must be," said Stuffy, sympathetically.

"What's doing?" the invalid inquired. He had

not yet fathomed the motive for the call. "Anything special?"

"No, I guess not," Smith replied. He ransacked his memory for something of interest. "You knew that Johnny Gurney eloped with a young widow from Syracuse, of course?"

"No, I didn't. What's she like?" asked the novelist.

"Don't know — I never saw her. And the Paul G. Whittakers lost all their money — it turned out that Mrs. Whittaker had been speculating with it. And Pete McCook has gone on the water-wagon for a year," said Stuffy, itemizing his stock of recent gossip.

"Really?" said King, who was more or less acquainted with all the people mentioned except the Syracuse widow. He shifted himself a trifle on his pillows. "Been up to Burnham lately?" he asked with an affectation of unconcern.

"Oh, yes. I was at the Brintons' over Sunday. They asked me to stay longer. They're giving a ball or something to-night — a sort of farewell blowout, I guess; I understand they're coming down to town in a few days."

There was more talk of Burnham.

"How are they all?" the invalid questioned.

"Fine and fit, I guess. The old man was right

up on his toes. Say, he's a good sport, isn't he? He seems to be awfully keen on young Miss Hyde; he hasn't let her out of his sight for a month; something doing there, I guess," said Stuffy, knowingly.

King sat up in bed with quickened interest; his frame stiffened.

"What's that?" he said sharply.

His visitor blundered on.

"They say it's all fixed up—John S. and the good-looking Hyde girl," he continued.

King knew that his visitor was incapable of forming a theory of his own.

"Who says so?" he demanded.

"Oh, I don't know; everybody, I guess," replied Smith, easily. "Mr. Brinton is around with her all the time."

"That doesn't prove anything," the invalid retorted quickly.

"Oh, no, it doesn't *prove* anything," Stuffy conceded with a laugh. "But it would be a pretty unusual girl that would throw down John S. Brinton, now wouldn't it?"

King reflected a moment.

"Yes. It would be an unusual girl," he said quietly. He looked over toward the blank-white wall beside his bed. "Say, Stuffy, I guess I'm

awfully weak yet — I'm afraid I'd better not talk any more to-day — you understand," he said apologetically, speaking toward the wall.

His visitor hastily got up.

"Say, I'm awfully sorry. I didn't mean to stay so long. I'm afraid I tired you out," he said with real self-reproach.

"Not at all. I'm just weak, that's all. Thanks for the Scotch. Good-by," said the invalid.

"Good-by," said the yellow-haired young man, and he went softly out, while the nurse followed him. It had never occurred to him for a moment that King's friendship with Eleanor Hyde had been more than a superficial and casual one.

The novelist lay back on his pillows, looking steadily out the single window. The September twilight had come, and the electric lights were commencing to shine clear in the darkening street. In his room the dusk was softening the white walls to a dull gray.

Mr. Brinton and Eleanor Hyde! King's eyes, staring indefinitely toward the waning light, grew a little dim. "It would be an unusual girl that would throw down John S. Brinton," Smith had said. Yes, that was undeniable. But he, Hamilton King, was not in the habit of falling in love with usual and commonplace young women,

squandering his heart upon mediocrities. And he was very deeply in love with Eleanor — there was no doubt of that. He had fallen in love with her at the very moment when he and Oliver Burgess had driven the yellow horse over the little bridge and up through the orchard walls into the Hyde place, and they had come upon her as she sat all dressed in white on the steps of the old farm-house, with apple blossoms in her smooth hair. He had marked then with an odd thrill her grace and prettiness and girlish dignity and charm, and the wonderful eyes that seemed to change their color with her mood, and were now light, dancing over laughing shallows of life, and were now cool, dark depths of unfathomable soul. John S. Brinton and Eleanor! The thought struck a sharper pang through King's wasted body than the fever which had almost dealt him death had been able to do. The fever! It came back to his mind that after all, in having spared him, death had not been over-kind. He glanced almost resentfully at his thin hands folded on the white sheet. He weighed over the fact that doubtless he was steadily gaining strength; he would yet live out a full round of empty years. But without Eleanor? Yes; he could even live without her, but without her he knew that it was a matter of absolute unconcern,

—a matter of total indifference to him whether he lived or whether he died. He was far more afraid of life than of death. He felt weak, weary, lonely.

The silent room steadily darkened. King tried bravely to turn his thoughts away from Eleanor; the pang of having lost her cut him like a knife; he had no martyr's liking for self-castigation; he was of men a man, and every recollection of her eyes, the caress of her soft voice, the grace of her ways, struck a bitter shaft through his heart. With an effort he shifted his mind to his book; *Harmony Dale* had been successful beyond expectation—but *Harmony Dale* was Eleanor. He had built up *Harmony* for other men to love as he himself loved Eleanor; and now his castles came crumbling down at his feet.

For a long time he lay looking out into the darkness with a curious feeling of the most utterly miserable helplessness he had ever known. The gently swaying branches of the maple trees were still making black, spotted, quivering shadows on the yellow curtain, and the warm evening breeze came in the open window. The street was now quite silent, and the footfalls of the occasional passers-by sounded sharply on the flag sidewalks. The white-walled room was quite dark.

Presently Miss Lynch, the gray-dressed nurse, opened the door and softly entered. The thread of King's thoughts broke; with just the ghost of a sigh he closed his tired eyes.

XV

VIRGIL employs some lively metaphors illustrative of the speed with which false rumor spreads abroad, and his conclusions are in the main correct. Certainly what he stated then is equally true now, for modern gossip circulates more swiftly than the average cyclone, and often involves a more dangerous and destructive force. When Stuffy Smith told King that every one expected that Mr. Brinton would marry Eleanor Hyde, he exaggerated only slightly. The world is quick to construe the attentions of a rich widower to a pretty girl as possessing the strong probability of a matrimonial termination, and it assumes the readiness of the girl — especially be she penniless, when the readiness is magnified into an eagerness — to enter willingly into the arrangement. Infrequently the assumption is incorrect.

In the city house of Mr. Brinton the capitalist and his daughter had just finished dinner, and coffee was being served to them in the library, a

room which the commander had caused to be stocked — literally stocked — under the direction of an impecunious essayist, who had begun his career with lofty ideals and practised art for art's sake, and who in consequence was financially a total failure and brought to practising strict economy for his own sake, a result commonly incidental to following correct but unpopular literary lines. A profitless fidelity to his ideals had reduced Mr. Hooker to the wearing of shiny clothes and of derby hats in which the original black had commenced to turn a sad, sickly green; and when Mr. Brinton had hired him to select and purchase regardless of cost the books needful to make up a first-rate gentleman's library, he had accepted the position with an avidity born of an approach to destitution, and had done his work conscientiously and well.

Mr. Brinton stretched himself out in a leather chair and blew a cloud of cigar smoke out in front of him.

"May, do you want anything?" he asked suddenly.

His daughter was somewhat surprised by this abrupt question. She wanted something, to be sure, but there was not anything she wanted which he was able to give her.

"I don't know. Why?" she said slowly.

"I made half a million dollars last week on a big turn in wheat," said the commander, "and I thought that if you'd seen anything lately that had taken your eye, — a necklace or a picture or a house, or anything of that sort, I'd get it and give it to you. If you see anything you want, buy it and charge it to me."

May shook her head.

"No. I don't know of any picture I'd like," she replied thoughtfully; "and I've got all the necklaces I want, — four or five are in the safe-deposit vaults now, — and I can't think of any house that's especially attractive — unless it's the one at Burnham."

The dominating spirit looked uneasily away.

"Oh, I didn't care much for that!" he said with manufactured deprecation. "Miserable little closet for a wine-cellar. Not nearly enough bath-rooms. Wretched train service. Whole thing very badly arranged."

"But I liked it. And it's a nice town," May argued.

"Oh, so-so," said the capitalist, carelessly. "It'll do." He knocked the ashes off his cigar.

"By the way, did you tell the people who own it to save it for us next year, before they rented it

to any one else? — did you get — what is it called — an option on it?" the girl inquired.

"Why, no," her father answered. He hesitated for his explanation of this omission. "I didn't think it worth while — I hardly think we'll be going back to Burnham again."

"Why, I thought it was awfully nice. And I thought you did, too. Didn't you?" replied his daughter, with some surprise.

The plutocrat smiled a little grimly.

"Well, I got a trifle tired of it toward the end; there were some features about it that I didn't like," he said with more than ordinary caution.

It came quickly into May's mind that her father must have gone farther upon the quest of Eleanor than she had suspected, and that she had not been aware of all that had passed. At the thought she was fired with sudden annoyance. She was angry with herself for having commended the fruitless pursuit which she now felt sure must have ended in her father's positive discomfiture — angry with Mr. Brinton for having allowed himself to be so easily led into such a position — angry with innocent Eleanor for having hurt her pride badly as well as having blocked the far-laid and ingenious plan which was to turn Hamilton King to her.

"What did you object to, for instance?" asked May, bluntly.

"Oh, I don't know," was the capitalist's vague reply.

The girl sat reflecting, while her father silently smoked. She was now convinced that she had come to the end of her wretched little intrigue; her plans had gone very badly, and she was well punished for having wrought them. She had thought to set Eleanor out of her path by marrying her to Mr. Brinton, and so draw Hamilton King to herself; it had fallen out that against her expectations Eleanor had probably set Mr. Brinton aside, and that the novelist's position was, so far as she could know, wholly unchanged. She had totally failed in her every object.

"I stopped in to see Ham King this afternoon," said her father, casually. "He sent word that he wasn't feeling very strong, and asked to be excused."

May's bitterness increased. King's refusal to receive her father she took as a personal slight. King was the victor; surely he might be a magnanimous one. Doubtless he would go, as soon as his strength returned, to Burnham, and then the little day-dream, to which she had all summer hopelessly clung, would be finally broken as soon

as he should meet the other girl. For this reason her father's next words fell on her ear with an uncommon shock.

"I hear King's expecting to leave for Japan or India, or somewhere around the world, as soon as he's strong enough to travel," the capitalist remarked.

The girl was genuinely startled. King on the point of going away! — going away as if he had lost! Could it be that she had been wrong throughout, and that he had not cared for Eleanor? Her intuition, her jealousy, which rang perfectly true, discarded this theory in an instant. Then could it be that the New England girl had put an end to King's chances by accepting Mr. Brinton? Never — May knew her father too well to consider this even plausible; the commander would have been treading the high heavens in the momentary delight of such an achievement, whereas he was now proceeding very demurely along the lower level places. She very strongly suspected that he had been flatly rejected; she was absolutely certain that he had not been accepted.

"He's going away?" she said blankly, but there was more of surprise than of regret in her voice.

King sat at a table next one of the west win-

dows which give on Fifth Avenue. It was about two in the afternoon, and he had just finished lunch. The restaurant was almost emptied of the gay throng of women, who had started in hansoms and coupés for the theatres. Outside, a cold, wet, gusty rain was rapidly falling. Through the blurred window beside him he could see cabs and carriages splashing up and down. There were very few wayfarers, and those few hurried along under slanted umbrellas, their coat collars turned up. The big policeman on the crossing huddled himself inside his heavy waterproof. The rain beat icily up against the window, rattling against the glass.

King rose rather reluctantly. He was to leave that evening for Chicago, and it was necessary that he go about town making purchases and afterwards return to his apartment to direct Griffiths in packing his effects for the long journey. He went slowly down the room, buttoning his mackintosh about his throat. Toward the end of the restaurant he saw a familiar group; May Brinton was just leaving a round table where she had been taking lunch with three other girls whom he knew slightly. He stopped.

"How do you do?" he said, putting out his hand.

May shook hands with him a little eagerly. The other girls walked out, leaving her alone with him.

"I just wrote you a note — thanking you for all you and your father did for me while I was ill," he said politely. He had not meant his words to carry a second significance, but the blood came into Miss Brinton's face when she thought guiltily of what she had tried to do.

"Oh, it wasn't anything," she answered — truthfully. "What is this I hear about your going away from us?" she said.

"I'm starting for India. I leave for Chicago to-night. I'm just off to pack up."

"India? What are you going to do in India? Are you getting material for a story there?" the girl asked.

"No. I'm very tired of things here. I don't believe I shall write any more stories — for a while, at least. I'm just going to India because it's about as far off as one can conveniently get. I fancy I shall do a good deal of shooting when my nerves brace up a bit — elephants and snipe and rabbits and tigers and lions and terrapin and boa-constrictors," said the novelist, calling off the list rapidly, with a touch of his old playful humor.

Miss Brinton laughed.

"You don't shoot boa-constrictors," she said. "It's considered extremely unsportsmanlike — like dynamiting tarpon. I forget just how you do get them, but I think that you either lasso them or fascinate them."

"Very likely you're right. But I can't throw a lasso, and when it comes to fascination, I'm much better as a shot," said King, gravely. He paused. "I'd meant to come and call on you all before I went away," he continued; "but I've been awfully busy, and I can't do very much — I'm pretty shaky yet. I couldn't see your father when he very kindly came to see how I was getting on, the other day — I felt too weak then."

"I'm very sorry," said the girl, sympathetically.

"Oh, I'm all right now," the novelist assured her. "I wonder whether Mr. Brinton wished to see me about — to tell me anything especial," he hazarded.

"Why, no; I don't believe so," May answered. "I think he just called to see how you were doing."

"Well, it was very kind in him," said King. He hesitated. "By the way," he said, with a pitiful attempt at off-handedness, looking down at the pattern of the carpet, "I hear your father is to be congratulated pretty soon."

The girl caught her nerves with a jerk. For the first time she saw his whole error with clear eyes. Evidently there had been a false rumor firmly lodged in King's belief, a misinterpretation of what to May were patent facts, a complete misunderstanding of what had transpired. He thought — he was convinced that Mr. Brinton was going to marry Eleanor, and May now perceived that this was the reason why he was going to India and trying to get as far away as he possibly could from all the old scenes and the people and the life he had known.

The first thing that flashed across May's mind was the selfish question of whether she could profit by his misunderstanding. Her spirits leaped shamefully up at the thought, but they abruptly fell again. To be sure she could send him away to India with a mere word of acquiescence, and as King was not a man who indulged in the discussion of his personal affairs, no one would ever know what part she had played in sending him on. But it came to her that there could be no advantage to her in such a step; the man who was standing before her was not a man who lightly tossed out his heart as a plaything for two girls to battle over; he had given it once and for all to Eleanor, and for him it was the one girl or

no girl forever. He was no wavering mariner; he had taken his course from a single lodestar, by which he had steered from the first day he had seen it in his heavens — the lodestar that had shone for him and would always shine. But even in that brief second while he stood there, May knew that she held his fate in her hand. All had been deceived but her. If she spoke, he would know the truth, and if she remained silent, he would go to India and leave his hope of happiness behind him. She met his eyes fairly — it was an effort.

"Papa to be congratulated, you say?" she repeated. "Why, what for?"

The words stuck in King's throat; the thought, for the first time put into words, seared his raw wound.

"I heard — he was to marry — Miss Hyde," he said in a queer, constrained voice.

The girl looked down for a moment in silence; then she did a very generous thing — one really fine thing which redeemed a part of many small, unright things she knew she ought not to have done.

"Then you have heard what is not true," she said quietly, for all her words cost her a pang. "I should know, I believe, if he were going to

marry Miss Hyde. He is not so fortunate. I must go now — good-by."

She shook hands with him and joined her friends who were waiting impatiently for her. She had said nothing to wish him a pleasant voyage; she deemed that such a word would be superfluous.

King stood by the blurred, wet window where she had left him, staring out on the avenue. Gusts of icy rain were beating down it. A big motor-car slashed heavily around the corner. A messenger boy passed down the sidewalk, bearing a package under his waterproof cape. The street was almost swept clear of pedestrians.

The novelist saw none of these things — his eyes went beyond the storm. He slowly took a small envelope from his pocket, and out of the envelope drew a green ticket — a ticket to Chicago on that evening's limited train. He looked at it rather curiously; with an odd smile he deliberately tore it into very small pieces.

The mellow sunshine of the Indian summer was giving the Connecticut hills a golden good-by. It touched lovingly the blazing sumac bushes in the swamps and the goldenrod and yellow and purple asters by the roadside and the deep-hued blue gentians on the lower meadows. All the stone

walls and fences about Burnham were hung with silky clematis or flaring strands of blackberry vines and creepers. The maple trees were crimson, and the oaks and mountain ashes and hickories and their fellows had felt the call of the year. The groundwork of the hills was turning a little brown; the branches of trees and bushes hung almost motionless in the sunshine.

Along the road from Burnham to Perkins Mills a young man in a ramshackle buggy drove a reluctant yellow horse that barely responded to the impatient flecks of the whip upon its leathery sides. The young man was rather thin, and his face showed traces of a recent illness, but his eyes were quite bright.

At Darius Hyde's place, where the road curves to the right and carries up the hill, he turned in through the gap in the stone wall that ran down to the road. He went over the wooden bridge that spanned the little brook, now almost choked with fallen leaves, red and yellow and brown; he went on through the orchard and reached the foot of the rise that led up to the old white farm-house with green blinds, that clung against the shoulder of the hill. There he saw something which made him catch his breath with a queer feeling in his throat and a beating heart. On the steps before

the old house sat a girl all dressed in brown with the sunlight on her smooth brown hair. She sat resting her face in her hands, looking down the road, looking just a little wistfully with long-lashed, soft brown eyes that seemed to catch the warm full sunshine in them. When she saw the man in the ramshackle buggy who urged the yellow horse slowly up the hill, the wistfulness went out of her eyes and a new light came into them, — a light more to be sought than the autumn sunshine.

At the top of the hill King got out of the ramshackle buggy, and at the foot of the steps Eleanor met him.

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